Chinese Contemporary Art Series

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This series focuses on what is happening to Chinese art in the course of recent decades. Since China has changed greatly, it is now a curiosity and a research task: What is that? Why is that? How can it be that? Culturally, why does Chinese art have its own special image narrative? How to evaluate and criticize Chinese art made today? Is it a continuation of its history and heritage? Is anything new that could be reconsidered further? Is Chinese art an artistic issue or a political one? This series of books will concentrate on such questions and issues and will invite international writers and scholars to contribute their thoughts on the explanation and elaboration of Chinese art today.

More information about this series at http://www.springer.com/series/13527

David Adam Brubaker • Chunchen Wang

Jizi and His Art in Contemporary China

Unification

Springer

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Preface to "Chinese Contemporary Art Series"

The world's present interest in and focus on China is related to the great changes that have taken place in China over the last 30 years. The alterations in many phenomena actually allow us to observe the changes in China. Historically, transformation of a closed localized area does not immediately and directly evoke a chain reaction in neighboring areas. Today, however, that is not the case, especially for a country like China that has the largest population in the world, that at present has a huge manufacturing capacity and capability, that consumes vast amounts of natural resources, and that exhibits an unprecedented environmental impact. When these kinds of changes occur in China, the world cannot but feel their existence and impact.

This is a necessary result of today's globalization and a phenomenon that cannot be avoided as the world has entered into the true meaning of the term "global village." It does not matter whether one opposes globalization, favors localized cultural diversity, or favors a kind of "you are within me and I am within you" concept often referred as "glocalization" by the neologism. Because of its historical transformation, China is *per force* a focus for the whole world and, moreover, is a top priority focus. Today, there are more and more research studies produced about China, while institutions established to undertake research on China are becoming more prevalent in the world. This is both the continuation of traditional "Chinese studies" and also, at the same time, the start of a new worldwide proposition: as a country that maintains its historical continuity, as a country that has endured more than a century of chaos after which it weakened and declined, can China truly become a modern state of significance and democracy for the world? This has become both a historical challenge and a practical issue.

Viewing the matter from China internally, the Chinese also have a historical curiosity about the events that have occurred, and they are eager to know what, after all, is the significance of these transformations. Although they are directly involved in their own desire for more answers, they know that these answers will not be obtained in the short term. In the field of art, the stories that appear and emerge have research value and require study because they are the results and visual symptoms of this historical transformation. The hope in editing and presenting this collection of writings is that, by means of publication, these literary works will observe, record, and reflect China's contemporary art stories and their significance. Publication will allow these articles and essays to reveal the development of art during a time of special temporal and spatial conditions. Searches for relevant scholarship reveal much historical baggage and an entangled history. Most of all, they provide a history of visual movements that requires special recognition and that represents the struggle and rebirth of art during a time when history is being remade.

As the embodiment of spiritual expression and real existence, China's contemporary art is rife with contradictions and strivings. Overall, however, contemporary art in China is quite different from that of any other historical period. It transmits the effects of the propagation of foreign concepts and values. China's artists, as the inhabitants of the piece of earth called "China", have an unprecedented variety of experiences. Chinese discussions and arguments about art, in both the modern and contemporary periods, have differed entirely from the dia-

logues and debates in other countries but, nonetheless, still show the impact of the times. Some of these arguments are about large topics such as a comparison of the west and China, cultural identity, and modernity, while some are about small topics such as styles of language, image generation, and even whether traditional brush and ink painting always reflects the psychology of a national culture. In fact, many of these issues are temporary, and many more are pseudo issues. Some of these issues are of a profound nature, while some involving rediscovery and recreation inspire new cultural and artistic entities. No matter what, the main problem of art in China today is that of putting art into practice. If there is no large quantity of creative art that is put into practice, then academic research could become specious. If art is not advanced uninterruptedly, it is difficult to continue with research that shows promising results.

This series focuses on what happens to Chinese art in the present and includes monologues, studies in art history, case studies, movements, critical discourses, and so on. This, after all, is work for the long term. By means of the publication of this work, we hope to build a worldwide research network on contemporary Chinese art, to pass on China's research and tradition of "Chinese studies", and to fuse together China's inquiries with those of interested audiences throughout the world.

Acknowledgments

Writing is a complex undertaking especially when the topic is contemporary Chinese art and the search for ways to spiritually enrich attitudes toward life in the present. Jizi's dedication and determination over many decades of painting makes a book such as this possible. With the help of his experiences, writings and conversations, we have assembled here a comprehensive volume of essays, commentaries, and reflections. Jizi's images on the theme of the unification of self, nature, others, and a larger universe are sources for stimulation, guidance, and enlightenment that each reader is invited to examine and appreciate. The result is a unique and grounded exploration of contemporary Chinese art, the contribution of Chinese philosophy to global art and culture, and practices for healing local rifts and social displacements that are felt worldwide from material and technological growth.

We would like to acknowledge, with thanks, the creative work of the authors represented in the appendix. These critics familiar with the global art scene enrich the volume and point to new avenues of inquiry, research, and study in comparative aesthetics. Gao Congyi contributes valuable descriptions of Jizi's search for a spiritual homeland, the space of "deep distance" and the notion of artist as sage. Yu Fan's discussion differentiates features of Chinese art and gives details of Jizi's pioneering method for realizing images of the spirit of Dao that is beyond images. In Jizi's paintings, winds howl and there are visions of open measureless caverns; these thoughts of Arthur Danto from Riverside Drive will remain for us always as an inspiration for imaginative readings. Curtis Carter stresses Jizi's experiments on pictorial space; he links Jizi's brush painting to leading contemporary artists such as Gu Wenda and Xu Bing. The breakthrough in depicting shifting space-times is the message from Deng Feng, who reminds us that Jizi is a present-day innovator. Jizi himself offers help to artists and scholars who seek contemporary interpretations for traditions of aesthetics belonging to Chinese philosophy.

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We finally thank Prof. Yi Ying of Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. He inspires inspires us on many points as we consider the reality of contemporary Chinese art.

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Professor of aesthetics and painting in the School of Art and Design at Wuhan Textile University. He received an M.F.A. in Painting from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a Ph.D. in Aesthetics from the University of Illinois at Chicago. His publications include book chapters for *Subversive Strategies in Contemporary Chinese Art, Buddhism and Merleau-Ponty*, and *Feminist Interpretations of Merleau-Ponty*, as well journal articles and art reviews. He is active as a painter and printmaker.

David Brubaker

Associate Professor at the Central Academy of Fine Arts China, as well as an Adjunct Curator of Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University, in 2013 he is appointed as Curator of Pavilion of China at the 55th International Art Exhibition – la Biennale di Venezia. Also editor-in-chief of *The Chinese Contemporary Art Series* published by Springer–Verlag, Germany and Deputy Principal Editor of *Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* in UK. In 2009 he was honored with the coveted Chinese Contemporary Art Award. The result of this award is the writing and publication of *Art Intervenes in Society*. Wang has also played a great influence on Chinese contemporary art criticism by his translations of over ten books of art history and theory: such as *After the End of Art* (Arthur C. Danto), *The Abuse of Beauty, Art Since 1940, Theory in Contemporary Art Since 1985,* etc. In 2013 his two volumes of essays are published: *The Democracy of Art* and *The Politics of Images*.

Dr. Wang Chunchen

Part I

Wang Chunchen

Conflicts and Confrontations: The Journey of China's Contemporary Chinese Ink Paintings

1

In October 2010, the University of Chicago celebrated the opening of the University of Chicago Center in Beijing by convening an international symposium on "Contemporary Chinese Ink Painting and the History of Art," a symposium that discussed issues, questions, and expectations about Chinese ink painting from a variety of perspectives. Because the word "contemporary" was placed first for emphasis, Chinese ink painting evinced new cultural meanings and possibilities that elicited interest from both domestic and foreign scholars as they proceeded with their discussions. What kind of art theories and historical discourses should scholars of various cultural backgrounds rely on when they discuss the issue of Chinese ink painting? In particular, what types of Chinese ink painting practices should they consider? The latter question in particular became the basis for discussions at the symposium. If there were no actual, meaningful Chinese ink painting practices, and if we were to rely solely on theoretical models to guide descriptions and demonstrations, then this would be inadequate for fully explaining the issues involved. Only on the basis of current practices of Chinese ink painters, can we master a reinterpretation of today's cultural perspectives and theories, and only then will it be possible to imagine how the development of Chinese ink-wash painting takes place and the kind of cultural relationship that this process has with the whole of contemporary society. After we have accomplished this, it will finally be possible to reveal historical truths about the Chinese ink painting process.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, China's revolutionaries, such as Kang Youwei, Chen Duxiu, and others, advocated radical change in Chinese ink painting. They promoted the adding of a realist style as the basis of reform. During the 1950s, when China proceeded with socialist construction, the medium of Chinese ink painting was brought into the new national consciousness as a means of expressing, for example, praise for China's great rivers and mountains and also the course of China's socialist reconstruction then in full swing. When we get to the 1980s, however, Li Xiaoshan, who at that time was still a graduate student in the Academy of Fine Arts, wrote an essay titled "Chinese Art is at a Dead End." This essay evoked the most intense controversy and debate about Chinese painting and ink painting in the twentieth century. Many artists and scholars participated in the debates, the refutations, and the establishment of opposing views. Everyone used their own concepts and perspectives to explain "Chinese art" and the condition of Chinese ink painting. For example, many artists and theorists were willing to call the paintings done in this medium "Chinese art." They saw these paintings as artistic symbols of Chinese culture, so how could they be at a "dead end"? Those who wanted to mock this view, however, would reply that it was sheer nonsense and not an opinion to be relied upon. Those who supported this view would then answer that such advocacy of Chinese ink painting was courageous in a way that hit the mark and touched the soul. In fact, after the Cultural Revolution, the people's spirit was dulled, and they were eager to revive the spirit of freedom. So some regarded Chinese ink painting, just as in the mediums of other kinds of painting, as having unresolved issues that everyone recognized, such as being stuck in the same old groove and other such serious faults. Speaking from the cultural atmosphere of that time, however, society had a common desire for innovation and progress, so in every field of endeavor, there were people proposing bold theories, from literature and philosophy to history and government, that gave rise to comprehensive and wide ranging debates. In a manner of speaking, this was a return to freedom of thought and a spiritual liberation. Some people referred to it as a "renaissance," so during debates about Chinese ink painting as a suitable medium for Chinese art, the cultural atmosphere was very similar to the period just before and after the May Fourth Cultural Movement when everyone was determined to undertake urgent reforms.

The historical significance is this: in the 1980s, the great debates about Chinese ink painting inspired the creative passions and desires of those artists who were inclined to reflect on the direction of Chinese ink art. Their innermost beings which had already been heavily paralyzed and wrapped for some years in ignorance ended up being liberated as a result of obtaining new understandings about art and a new

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awareness of the place of ink painting in Chinese art as a whole. During this period of recognition, Chinese ink painting was seen as a symbol of spiritual liberation and not purely as a national cultural heritage. For the innovators, the tendency of viewing the medium as primarily a symbol of national heritage was a sign of lagging behind with an isolated style and point of view. This tendency toward isolation in art is a common problem in different periods through the ages. Because of such advocacy for isolation, there are always the moralists screaming in objection to transmission and expression by innovators and against apologists who defend them. But the innovators' ink paintings are not the experimental results of temporary art. Rather, they are full confirmation and approval for the appreciation of the spirit of artistic freedom. If, in all the ways humanity has of living, art is still not capable of giving humanity new changes and developments in vision, concepts, and understanding, then how can art be established as the means and object of creative thinking?

If artists of this era did not forge ahead, then they would not have had the courage and magnanimity that it takes to lead the way. How then could there be any reform of China's deep and long-standing issues? That era's atmosphere of reform saturated China and, as a result, influenced thinking and discussions about Chinese ink painting. In the 1990s, Wu Guanzhong's famous remark that "*bimo* (brush and ink) amount to nothing" was like a pebble dropped in a lake that creates a multitude of ripples. Wu's remark angered the advocates of inertia in Chinese ink painting who responded that the brush carries the essence of the ink, that painting is not just a matter of adding ink to brush. These advocates insisted that the essence of this kind of art resides in ink, that without the brush there is no ink, that the ink borrows the brush to complete the art, and that ink and brush are the substance of Chinese brush painting. These memorable discussions about issues in Chinese painting took place twice, once in the 1980s and again in the 1990s. On the one hand, reformist thought in Chinese society was a given that produced radical views, while on the other hand, many also felt that the very existence of Chinese brush painting was at issue and hoped to open a new path forward in response to the debates. In particular, many hoped that a lateral comparison with other forms of art would lead to the discovery of new and diverse meanings for brush painting and not merely to continued reverence for traditional use of the medium.

Brush painting is still alive and undergoing changes. With the influence of new concepts of art, people can of course increase their knowledge of Chinese brush painting and its possibilities. This initially appears to be a plain commonsense truth. But during the 1980s, it soon became clear that the situation with regard to new influences and the development of new meanings was not a simple matter. Thinking about Chinese brush painting became involved with such issues as national identity, culturalism, traditional heritage, psychological inertia, cognitive attitude, and so on. Originally or customarily, the visual sensitivity of artists was a habit restricted by cultural traditions and changes originating in the visual environment. But during the new period of open debate and innovation, artists began to ask themselves new questions: do we have a mindset willing to accept a new Chinese ink painting style that will produce changes? Can we break down Chinese ink painting's unique respect for brush and ink? In all those early years when Qi Baishi was coming and going from Beijing, people failed to acknowledge his art and referred to him sarcastically as the "wild fox Chan adherent," or as one who hopes to achieve enlightenment in Chan Buddhism without first studying sutras or meditating for long periods of time. Fortunately, Qi later made the acquaintance of Chen Shizeng who discovered and took notice of Qi's significance as an artist. Only then did Qi become prominent socially. The point here is that it is not only the forms of Chinese ink painting that are important. Innovation also requires that critics and audiences develop an attitude of openness to the medium of Chinese ink painting as a means for communication. This is completely similar to the openness of contemporary art. What we must first change and transform is all the concepts and ideas that revolve around art and its evaluation. Artists who dare to take risks must over and over strike at entrenched and seemingly inherent concepts of art and style. This is especially a challenge for conservative artists who merely continue to follow various innovative methods that have accumulated from advances made in the past.

So then how should we understand and comprehend contemporary Chinese ink painting in the twenty-first century? Some will ask if the language defining the term "contemporary Chinese ink painting" has been adequately established. We must reply that the meaning of "contemporary Chinese ink painting" is not the same as "contemporary art," even though both terms include the word "contemporary." This word signifies change and new expressions that fit in with today's visual experiences, while at the same time, it modifies the historical content of Chinese ink painting. If it does not encompass this latter relationship as well, then there will be no way for a work of art to be called "contemporary Chinese ink painting" and still qualify at the same time as contemporary art, for in such cases, use of the term "contemporary art" would cancel out "contemporary Chinese ink painting." Both new artworks that express change and Chinese ink paintings can count as contemporary, but this is so because the word "contemporary" functions in two different language systems. For this reason, the language of judgment and criticism differs in the two cases, even though the basic spirit is the same. In both contexts, "contemporary" is used as a means of referring to certain problems that occur, and

in each case, the goal is to produce a response to those problems.

As for the term "contemporary Chinese ink painting," it has many symbolic meanings and objects of reference that challenge us.

First, Chinese ink paintings exhibit a range of additional features that differ from the drawing, the language, and the medium of expression that characterize traditional examples of this category of art. Chinese ink painting can extend beyond those works advocated by traditional forces that encourage isolation and confrontation. Traditionalists often slander and pour scorn on innovators to the point of being contemptuous. In the face of such a content of strong traditional resistance, in order to proceed with exploring and realizing a Chinese ink painting that is contemporary, artists must sacrifice their egos for the larger spirit of artistic freedom. The bitter sweetness of this endeavor is difficult to put into words.

Second, Chinese ink painting conflicts and collides with the haughtiness and explosiveness of the contemporary art environment. That environment infects the 1000-year-old soul of Chinese ink painting that is then seen as noncontemporary: how can the medium of Chinese ink painting be contemporary? Such thinking in turn creates the ostensible absence of Chinese ink painting in contemporary art and produces an alternative and marginalizing treatment. This helps to explain how Chinese ink painting is sometimes vulgarized and lowered in some art contexts. It also explains how it is often outside the purview of people today. Chinese ink painting is not passive because of tradition. Rather, it is obscure because it is sluggish due to some present-day ways of thinking about art. It is necessary for Chinese ink painters to maintain a dignified posture, when they display their work in a context that is called "contemporary." It is necessary for them to be bold in thinking, reasoning, questioning, and criticizing their own tradition in order to counter unfavorable external environments of this kind.

Third, because of its special Eastern characteristics, Chinese ink painting is just on the edge of Western artistic systems of interpretation. Because our understanding and practice of it are often not included in contemporary artistic discourse, Chinese ink painting is doubly neglected and ignored. This neglect is not the result of some cultural or geopolitical strategy; it is, rather, the result of an inadequate and incomplete contemporary transformation of some interpretations of Chinese ink painting. From the speeches of the participants at the symposium on the theme "Contemporary Chinese Ink Painting and the History of Aesthetics," we can see some of the concerns and expectations that scholars now have with regard to Chinese ink painting's cultural identity. For example, Alexandra Munroe, a curator of the Guggenheim Museum's Asian Division, hopes that discussions about Chinese ink painting will spring away and outward from Chinese regions and mediums; she anticipates a wider and more open "Chinese ink painting attitude." Given such a perspective of expansion across art mediums and regions, Chinese ink painting becomes a phenomenon that cannot be neglected or marginalized in the world's aesthetic history. It can no longer be ignored as something special that belongs merely to Eastern cultural contexts. At the same time, we should not be anxious that its cultural identity will be threatened by expansion. Shen Yubing, from an analysis of the case of the artist Huang Binhong, argues that Chinese ink painting can maintain its own artistic self-disciplined development. Li Peng confirms that it has an ethos of its own that gives it a distinctive contemporary rationality. The essays and speeches at the symposium produced the overall feeling that Chinese ink painting need not be confined to a region. Yet, there was also general agreement that it should not strive to take the same transformative track as modern Western art; otherwise, its distinctiveness might be eliminated from contemporary art. This is just to say that when we discuss this subject within the configuration of today's globalism and contemporary art, we must both return to Chinese ink painting itself and, at the same time, endow it with new understanding and meaning. Although there is no unanimity on how to determine the style of contemporary Chinese ink painting, it is an indisputable fact that different instances of this painting already exist as an art phenomenon. For this reason, in research today, we can form different theoretical dimensions for discussion and classification, and we need not seek a unified model. Even more importantly, we must put an end to the shallow judgment that Chinese ink painting is not a form of contemporary art. We must attack and criticize the present attitude of isolation and associated phenomena that are resistant to all innovation.

However, when we have returned Chinese ink painting to a critical context and are not merely engaged in theoretical and historical analysis and research, the challenge of designating a work as "contemporary" still presents multiple obstacles and difficulties. In fact, it becomes even more necessary and urgent to have an innovative awareness and cultural consciousness. Innovation is neither just a sudden rupture nor is it blind rejection, but rather it is a process for establishing a new cultural consciousness. This new consciousness should place Chinese ink painting within the context of contemporary multiculturalism where it can reflect strong cultural awareness and courage. In this way, the objects to which Chinese ink painting responds will include far more than ink painting itself: it will also present a challenge to secular extremism, snobbishness, and cultural ignorance. As to the contemporary work of the innovators, we should voice our support and create sufficient space for free debate. Most importantly, contemporary Chinese ink paintings belong to an art that is far removed from the market place for vulgar Chinese ink paintings. They are not merely playful images

with romantic themes. Moreover, if we say that contemporary art is a direct expression of the complexity of contemporary political discourse, then there are some other Chinese ink paintings that express a narrow and stubborn cultural conservatism. The practice and encouragement of innovation is an attack on the stubborn fortress of Chinese ink painting's conservatism and a critique of the proliferation of lyrical ink painting. This critical advocacy of change is exactly what we have called "the Chinese ink painting attitude." Because this attitude is a spirit that we advocate in the face of today's artistic reality, what it faces mostly are the obstacles of vulgarism, parochialism, and close-mindedness. If we come face to face with Chinese ink painting artists who are practicing their art, we will find that their uncertainty is primarily about how to make their own way and the extent to which their chosen medium permits a degree of freedom. Chinese ink painters have, on the one hand, gone beyond the medium's traditional meanings; on the other hand, they cannot escape the attributes of the medium. This has led to an anxiety about the medium but not an anxiety about identity. There is an anxiety about the value of art but not about aesthetic values.

Research on Chinese ink painting should resolve not only the history of aesthetics issues but also the concern about authentic art criticism. Chinese ink painting certainly will not wait until all has become history and then require criticism. Present practice demands intervention and confirmation by criticism today. Authentic criticism of this type will not ask whether Chinese ink painting has reached its termination. Instead, it will be about the manner in which this painting belongs to aesthetic history and about why some practices of Chinese ink painting cater only to the vulgar demands of a certain time or the unhealthy demands of a political culture. Forming a new and lively critical language for Chinese ink painting is also a burning issue: if we allow mislabeling due to use of clichés, this will hinder the recognition and description of contemporary innovations. A sensible and serious theoretical attitude is a prerequisite in this case for successful criticism. At present in the international arena, new expectations for research on Chinese ink painting are based on contemporary breakthroughs in artistic diversity and on the inherent qualities of Chinese culture, not on cultural nationalism or the supposed opposition between China and the West. This point has reference value for our attitude and expectations toward Chinese ink painting because the present period is no longer one of a blind strengthening of the so-called opposition between China and the West, nor one of a Western ideology that calls for the colonization of Chinese culture. If we merely use such earlier approaches for criticism and reflection upon Chinese ink painting, then this is equivalent to using our own weak artistic language to perpetuate narrow prejudices, or else to using an arrogant psychology that rejects all changes in order to cling to paintings that are ossified and inferior.

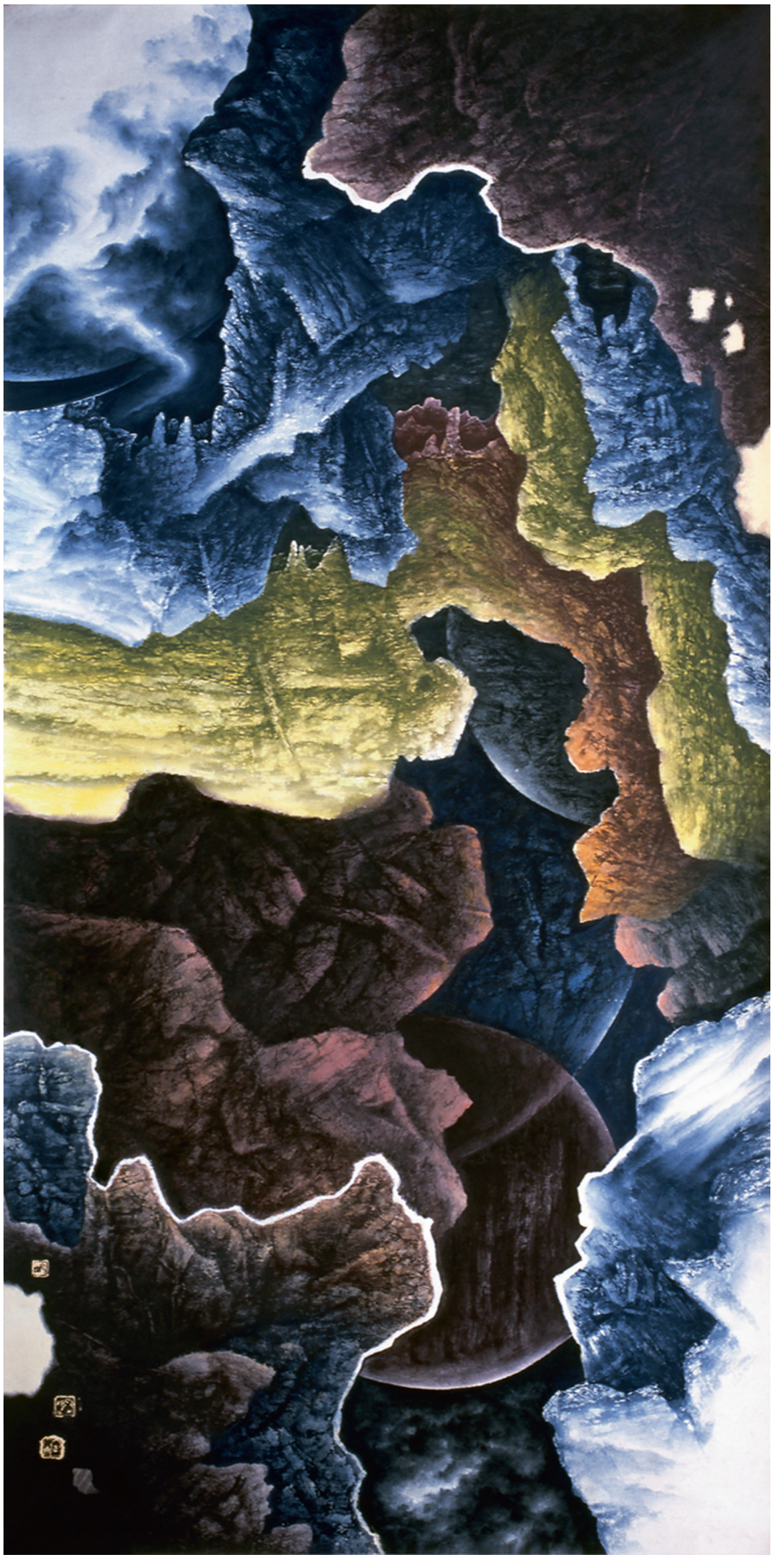
Speaking from the point of view of sensibility, authentic contemporary Chinese ink painting is a symbol of the spirit, a tenacious expression of the will to live. This kind of painting is a practice of resistance and a counterattack on intolerant cultural conservatism, prejudices, and vulgarizations. For this reason, those who approve the nomenclature of "contemporary Chinese ink painting" want to advance innovative ideas and recreations of the medium in order to address chronic ills. Whether or not "contemporary" is a judgmental term in their vocabulary of values will be revealed as soon as it is put in front of "Chinese ink painting."

Strangeness and what conflicts with visual inertia are likely to be on the front line of innovation. The innovators do not seek to sing along with the choir, nor do they take pleasure in secular praise. They seek to fulfill their own tasks and practice their own artistic ideals. They use the strangeness of their compositions to complete Chinese ink painting's contemporary transformation and revolution. This is the active embodiment of yet another kind of contemporary "difference," so there is an existing group of contemporary Chinese ink paintings that can be critically evaluated and advocated.

The cultural significance of today's Chinese ink painting is primarily not that of nationalism but rather the inner issues of multiculturalism and the extending of a civilization to the point of the transmission and promotion of a cultural spirit. Chinese ink painting will not become again the closed artistic concept and language of a given place or region. On the contrary, there will be a new recognition of Chinese ink painting in the fusion of an internationalism that uses a newborn heterogeneous manner to reveal Chinese ink painting's space for development and the expressiveness of its language. This recognition and new flourishing are related to the modern period's broadening of horizons, and it is also related to artists' tenacious cultural beliefs. These beliefs are derived from our own current period's honing of artists. The immortal spirit of a cultural attitude decides now the height to which Chinese ink paintings will rise. Speaking from a shared common sense, humanity's firm beliefs will become the foundation for Chinese ink painting's new life and a precondition for its creative existence as an active art.

This book then is a case study in the contemporary practice of Chinese ink painting. The artist Jizi has striven his whole life to accomplish two things: how to extend the internal expressiveness of ink painting, and how to make a breakthrough for ink painting in the contemporary cultural atmosphere. The extension and breakthrough are not achieved merely by crossing from one medium to another, nor are they accomplished by a simple variation of form. "They result, rather, from exploring the potential of ink painting to serve as a carrier of a particular kind of philosophy." This year Jizi is 74 years of age. He started studying ink painting in his teens, and he has always sought an increase in the scope and a breakthrough in the reception of ink painting by audiences.

Especially after China's renewed "opening up," Jizi's artistic thinking underwent a change. He deeply felt the immensity of the proposition that is artistic creation; nevertheless, he has continued his efforts all the way through to the present. Does this striving correspond to the historical trend of periodic changes in Chinese culture? From early 2010, David Brubaker, then visiting Beijing for the 18th International Congress of Aesthetics, took notice of Jizi and developed an interest in his art and thought. Shortly, thereafter began an exchange and communication with me. In 2011, when we had the chance to meet again in New York, David had determined to return again to China with more time to focus on the case of Jizi and the cultural implications of his ink paintings. In the summer of 2012, David started teaching in China in the city of Wuhan. On the one hand, he taught, while on the other hand, he researched and wrote about Jizi. He visited Jizi five times, and each visit lasted for several days. David and Jizi even visited the town where Jizi grew up as a boy. In these years, David read a wide range of books and articles on ink painting and advanced his writing by meeting face to face with Jizi. For this reason, he has a unique perspective on thinking about and understanding ink painting issues, and he melds into this his cultivation of Western philosophy and artistic thought. During this time of more than two years of writing, David and I held in-depth discussions where we talked freely about the differences and similarities in Chinese and Western culture and art. We were especially moved by the changes in today's China and those artists who have striven their whole lives for art. We both felt deeply that the development of Chinese art and ink painting is a historically long-lasting undertaking that requires the engagement of one generation after another. In this present globalized era, horizontal cultural exchanges and studies are now more numerous than ever before. Such exchanges make possible a variety of artistic creations not only where China is watching the world but also where the world is watching China.



Part II

David Brubaker

Questions

2

2.1 Questions and Debate

Can Chinese ink-wash artists use their traditional materials to make contemporary contributions to world art at this historical moment? This is to ask whether Chinese ink painters can address the present needs of people in the current period of global growth. Chinese ink painting is often described as a medium most expressive of Chinese cultural heritage. So, by inquiring about Chinese ink paintings and their relevance to the present, we are also asking about the role of traditional Chinese culture as a guide for Chinese artists who seek to make art that is authentically Chinese and of benefit to global audiences. Throughout the past 100 years, Chinese artists and critics have debated and returned to both questions. The task here is to sort through differences of opinion and to affirm a contemporary role for both Chinese ink-wash painting and Chinese philosophical thought about the union of self with nature, other persons, and a larger universe. Our path leads us to consider the meaning of "contemporary," plans for the reform of traditional Chinese painting, the search for what is called "Chineseness", and the adequacy of Chinese aesthetics compared with Arthur Danto's Euro-American philosophy of art. We can proceed by examining the thoughts, practices, and ink-wash paintings of Jizi who lives now in Beijing. His reliance on traditional Chinese aesthetics and success as a synthesizer and interrogator offer a promising approach. We can gather his claims about the contemporary value of traditional Chinese aesthetics for ink-wash painting and test them against the compositions that he has created in recent decades. These pages advance the thesis that some contemporary Chinese ink-wash painters use traditional materials successfully to express philosophies of the unification of self, nature, and universe that characterize Chinese culture. The ultimate aim is to produce a wider appreciation for the way that ink painting expressive of Chinese thinking about existence with nature can contribute to a contemporary global culture that is vibrant, complex, diverse, and affirming of the present.

These initial questions concerning the value of ink-wash painting and Chinese cultural heritage take us into a creative and productive tangle of ideas and opinions. Even the capacity of Chinese ink painting to qualify as contemporary art is questioned today. Opinions may vary on whether Chinese ink wash is contemporary, because current usage of the term "contemporary" is changing. The term has been regarded as synonymous with being in a common period of time and progressing towards some future utopia envisioned by modernists. But some art historians and curators are now redefining it in relation to "contemporaneity", a word that they use to denote an awareness of *presentness* or a thickening of the present that occurs without subordination to expectations of the future. As Terry Smith puts it, contemporaneity involves giving priority to immediacy over epoch, the presence of one person to another in the present, and direct experience of complexity: It is "the constant experience of radical disjunctures of perception, mismatching ways of seeing and valuing the same world…all thrown together."[1] At least for Smith, "contemporaneity" is not a new term for the old modern; it expresses living with experience of complexities and mismatchings by means of a novel awareness of the present as an immediate thickness or place.

What the terms "contemporary" and "contemporaneity" imply today for the making and interpretation of the diverse styles of Chinese ink art is still in dispute. For example, the curator Wu Hung suggests that the expression of contemporaneity requires the rejection of traditional painting mediums such as Chinese ink on paper and also oil on canvas: "contemporaneity in contemporary Chinese art entails a wide-ranging effort to challenge the traditional dominance of painting in visual art and even to dismiss painting as an independent art form."[2] In a reply to Wu Hung, Jerome Silbergeld objects that this is ceding "contemporaneity" to one group of artists and denying it to "traditional arts, whose role

[1] Smith (2006, p. 701, 703).

[2] For Wu Hong's text and commentary, see Silbergeld (2009, p. 128).

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is to creatively extend and preserve the past."[3] Nor is there agreement on whether a culture of contemporaneity offers a presentness that stabilizes, even after Terry Smith's claim that the experience of complexity ultimately involves "valuing the same world." Questions continue, since Smith also claims that the phenomena of contemporaneity results in an art of "multeity" and "inequity" and no deeper stability.[4] Wang Chunchen foresees instead a more positive outcome for those who negotiate the complexity of contemporaneity: he considers experience "with countless alien elements" as a means for breaking though "the containment of language" and entering into a root reality "to read the new self."[5] The question here is whether cultural styles of contemporaneity point to stabile roots of moral significance by emphasizing the thickness of the present. Finally, Maxwell K. Hearn writes in his role as a curator that his definition of "contemporary" excludes "works that hew closely to the cannons of *guohua* (traditional Chinese-style painting)…."[6] Hearn explains his aim for a more inclusive definition that does limit formal solutions available to artists. Yet, he still seeks to define the complexity of contemporary Chinese ink art by appealing to "aesthetic choices or stylistic references that are indelibly linked to China's cultural past."[7] Thus, after some reflection, we are led to consider again whether at least *some* cannons of style indelibly associated with traditional aesthetic choices of Chinese ink-wash painters may contribute now to the making of images that express unification with a thickness of the present or contemporaneity. In short, if we are to assess the full capacity of Chinese ink-wash painting to serve as contemporary art, we must consider opposing opinions carefully and seek to avoid presuppositions that slow appreciation.

Throughout the twentieth century in China, advocates of movements for innovation and tradition have debated a set of perennial questions about the merits and defects of traditional Chinese ink painting. Should Chinese art be reformed? If so, then *how? How much* can it be changed if it is to express continuity with Chinese cultural heritage? With the end of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), and the Revolution of 1911, three different policies for the revitalization of Chinese painting emerged: continuation of traditional Chinese ink painting (*guohua*), absorption of modern "scientific modeling" or realism, and synthesis with modern abstraction observed in Euro-American avant-gardes. The advocates of realism and abstraction both favored acceptance of influences from abroad. Cai Yuanpei (1868–1940) asserted that the improvement of life required implementation of the scientific attitude evident in Europe. He became an advocate of realism, despite his observation of the latest experiments in Cubism during a visit to Picasso's studio in 1915.[8] Chen Duxiu (1879–1942) advocated reform of traditional arts and literature. His declaration of 1917 calls upon writers to replace the literature of the recluse with "a plain-speaking and popular literature of a living society."[9] In painting, he regarded the realism of some European styles as an antidote to traditional Chinese painting and its Confucian foundations that he deemed incompatible with modern ideas of social equality. Xu Beihong (1895–1953) favored a synthesis of Chinese painting with a realism devoted to scientific truth; his results are evident in *The Foolish Man Removing the Mountain* (1940) and a series of ink-wash paintings of horses for which he is now well known. While Xu Beihong argued against the influence of abstraction from Europe, other Chinese artists such as Lin Fengmian (1900–1991) sought renewal by synthesis with the work of modern artists such as Cézanne and Matisse. Lin called for the merging of Chinese emotion with techniques from Europe.[10] Yet, he was not a proponent of art for art's sake, and he initiated the slogan "art for people's life" (*yishu wei rensheng*), a phrase meant to express compassion for those suffering.[11] Working in Shanghai alongside Lin Fengmian, Pang Xunqin (1906–1985) and Ni Yide (1901–1970) started the Storm Society (1931–1935), where members exhibited and developed modern styles inspired by Cubists, Fauves, and Léger.[12]

In the early years of the People's Republic of China, a polarization of opinions with regard to the reform of traditional Chinese painting emerged once again. With his Yan'an Talks of 1942, Mao Zedong expressed some general guidelines: tradition was to be modified to serve the needs of the present, and some traditions needed to be pushed out to advance a new form and content.[13] However, after 1949, the need to augment these guidelines with specific policies regarding traditional Chinese painting became acute, as authorities faced large numbers of traditional ink painters in big cities and at established art colleges. Could Chinese ink painting be modernized by the merger with "scientific" modeling absorbed from Europe, without sacrificing Chinese painting heritage? How could classics of *guohua* be upheld as a source of pride, when the old was to be pushed out in favor of a new form and

[3] Silbergeld (2009, p. 128).

[4] Smith (2006, p. 704).

[5] Chunchen (2010, pp. 3–4).

[6] Hearn (2013, p. 8).

[7] *Ibid*. (p. 14).

[8] Sullivan (2012, p. 32).

[9] *Ibid*. (p. 33).

[10] For accounts of Chen Duxiu, Xu Beihong, and Lin Fengmian, see Croizier (1993, pp. 137, 135–143).

[11] Minglu (2011, p. 37).

[12] Croizier (1993, pp. 135–143, 151–152).

[13] Galikowski (1998, pp. 18, 30).

new content? The Yan'an Talks did not differentiate those aspects of traditional Chinese painting that could serve from those to be discarded. As a result, even within the official institutions such as the Artists' Association, deep divisions of opinion arose when reformers sought to inject "scientific modeling" and a new social content into the practice of traditional Chinese painting.[14]

The poet Ai Qing's (1910–1996) speech of 1953 to the Shanghai Art Workers Political Study Group still crystallizes the challenge for anyone who aims to describe how contemporary Chinese ink-wash painting meets the needs of those living in the present. His remarks remain fresh with implications for those who seek to explain how Chinese ink-wash painters can absorb Euro-American artistic traditions and still make contributions to global art that are specifically Chinese. The speech offers a foothold for resolving the disagreements over the value and usefulness of *guohua*. It expresses the opinion of reformers who insist on adding realistic forms that reference real social conditions, and it expresses at least briefly the opinion of traditionalists who point to a unique aesthetic of spirit and observable form. Ai Qing argues as follows: Since times and lives have changed, *guohua* needs to change also in content and form. For the most part, he articulates forcefully the standards for creating the new *quohua* that exhibits a new realist form and a content of real social relations. The new form is based on observation of nature, and the new content springs from new feelings toward working people in the present. Landscape painters can satisfy both standards, as long as they pursue "feelings toward nature" that are in "close relationships to people and society."[15] The emphasis on real working people by means of realism of representation is clear: "The excellence or poorness of a painting must be seen first in whether it accords with social reality and natural reality."[16] This advocacy of direct observation of people and landscapes as a method for revitalizing *guohua* is repeated by Cai Ruohong (1910–2002) during the same period: Artists should be trained in sketching and painting on the spot.[17] To summarize, Ai Qing holds that the Chinese ink-wash painting is new because it uses principles of verisimilitude or resemblance to depict physical forms and real conditions of social life.

For our own investigation here, Ai Qing's lecture has value because he refers at least briefly to the positive role of *guohua*, as a site for continuing the most precious part of Chinese cultural heritage. In three sentences, Ai Qing opens the question that is repeated often now today: How far can Chinese painting be modified in form and content, before it no longer continues the cultural heritage that is Chinese? His question is whether there is anything remaining in an ink painting with an entirely new content and new form that would save it from being merely "a Western painting." Ai Qing opens the question in the following way:

> Where is the new in new *guohua*? I think we need (1) new contents and (2) new forms. If contents are new but forms are not new, then [the work] is only half new; if forms are new but contents are not new, [similarly, the work] is only half new. But if the contents and forms are both new, then won't it become a Western painting? This raises the question of how to continue our heritage. Only if we continue the most precious part of our national painting heritage and then create things with new contents and new forms can we call this completely new Chinese painting.[18]

In effect, Ai Qing grants that his forceful advocacy of realistic forms and a socialist content—two features also found in culture—gives pause for thought: Where is the *guohua* in paintings with the new form and content? What is Chinese in the new Chinese ink painting that Ai Qing proposes to his audience? Ai Qing volunteers the answer that a painting is specifically Chinese because it is characterized by some third feature that is independent of form and content. The authentically Chinese painting is one in which "the most precious part" of Chinese heritage is to be *continued*. Thus, Ai Qing is calling on Chinese ink painters to continue this most precious part *in addition* to imposing the new form and content. Once Ai Qing refers to this third component of preciousness, it seems clear that he is committed implicitly to two more premises. The painter must have some aesthetic principle for deciding whether a work continues the most precious part, and this aesthetic principle must be independent of the standards used to evaluate the new form and the new content. It follows that there must be a distinctly different content for the third standard that is to be used for assessing whether a painting continues the most precious part and is not merely "a Western painting."

How is Ai Qing's speech relevant to our concerns today? He asks artists to work from a direct and profound observation of nature and to address the needs of the living. Such requests surely resonate. However, it is his opening of the question of what makes the new *guohua* Chinese that is most relevant for our study. Given his purpose of introducing the new standards for form and content, Ai Qing does not stop to give his opinion about the medium needed to continue the most precious part, when both form and content are entirely new. He offers no descriptions for what the most precious part of Chinese painting heritage might be. The speech is valuable for raising questions of interest even if it does not answer them. *Where* in the composition or the image of a painting does one observe the continuance of the most precious part

[14] *Ibid.* (p. 30).

[15] *Ibid.* (p. 117).

[16] *Ibid.* (p. 118).

[17] *Ibid.* (pp. 31–32).

[18] For the text of Qing Ai's remarks, see Andrews (1994, p. 115). See also Ai (1953, pp. 7–9).

of Chinese painting heritage? What needs to be added to a painting besides the new realistic forms and the new content of socialist cooperation, so that it will continue to express what the ink painter within Chinese culture regards as most precious? Ai Qing does not say, but his speech does authorize such questions. The speech suggests that *guohua* may be defined by its materials: "so-called guohua, are paintings painted with Chinese brush, Chinese ink, and Chinese pigments on Chinese paper or silk."[19] But, surely, the Chinese artists must assemble these materials in a distinctive way and in accordance with some intended principle of Chinese aesthetics in order to continue what is regarded as most precious. Ultimately, Ai Qing's speech makes two points that give us a clear direction: There is a most precious part of Chinese heritage continued in traditional Chinese ink painting, and this precious part is not continued if the painter merely creates an image that resembles the forms of real physical conditions.

Although Ai Qing does not mention it in his speech, traditional Chinese aesthetics has articulated for centuries a defining principle of authentic ink-wash paintings that does not depend on resemblance or a realistic style. This is the principle called "rhythmic vitality" or "spirit resonance" (*qiyun* 氣 韻) that we shall soon examine. Briefly put, if a painting is to be an authentic expression of the vitality and liveliness of the individual person's unique existence within nature in the present, then it must be made according to two aesthetic principles: The first is vitality or spirit (*qi*) and the second is rhythm or resonance (*yun*). Throughout the 1950s, no consensus developed among leading cadres on the value of *qiyun* as a guide for painters. As Maria Galikowski describes in her vivid account of opposing attitudes at the time, the aesthetic principle of *qiyun* became a cultural site of polarization and uncertainty. [20] In the text below, written in 1950, Li Hua (1907–1994) argues as a reformer that artists must de-emphasize the traditional literati principle of *qiyun* associated with the making of traditional Chinese landscape paintings. It is not entirely clear whether Li calls for its complete abandonment. In presenting this passage to us, Galikowski writes that Li Hua regarded "the expunging of the 'literati ideas and concepts'" as a precondition for reform; however, she also describes him as making the more moderate claim that "breath resonance" and the principles of *qi* and *yun* "should not be pursued as ends in themselves."[21] With regard to the subject matter, Li's remarks clearly suggest that flowers, birds, and poetic landscapes are to be replaced by images depicting the reality of social cooperation:

> Breath resonance [*qiyun*], brush and ink and other manifestations of formalism are no longer the directions pursued by artists. Painting should express collective life and the thoughts and feelings of "the people," so it must be realistic. Expressing the truthful, the ideological and the educational aspects of reality constitutes the highest realm of art. Thus, landscapes, flowers-and-birds and the "Four Gentlemen" have no scope for development.[22]

Those who shared Li Hua's thinking regarded Shi Lu (1919–1979) and Jiang Zhaohe (1904–1986) as artists who excelled at organizing ink-wash painting according to the new form of scientific modeling and the new social content. However, as Galikowski informs us, Fu Baoshi (1904–1965), Mo Pu (1915–1996), and Pan Tianshou (1897–1971) defended traditional landscape painting, its aesthetic basis, and its capacity for conveying space and genuine color without need for reliance on realistic techniques absorbed from Europe. In a 1954 issue of *Fine Art,* Mo Pu cited Qi Baishi's (1864–1957) prawns and all paintings by Shitao (1642–1707) in support of the conclusion that traditional Chinese painting depicts people and landscapes in an unparalleled way that reveals the spirit accompanying an object.[23] Pan Tianshou, a foremost flower-and-bird painter, warned that any use of European techniques to insert shading and "scientific modeling" would obscure the role of line in Chinese painting and weaken its unique capacity to convey form in unification with soul.[24] Zhang Ding (1917–2010), at that time deputy head at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, saw that debates on how and whether traditional Chinese painting should be modified merely caused an increase in polarization. He found that most people eventually advocated no reform or complete denial of tradition. But he had no solution to offer.[25] Since no consensus was ever reached, official policy toward *guohua* fluctuated from tolerance to suppression according to the attitudes that prevailed at any given moment.

Beginning with the 1980s, ink artists interested in a synthesis with modern Euro-American art and aesthetics reestablished momentum. One early event in this movement toward modern avant-garde styles was Wu Guanzhong's (1919–2010) essay "Formalist Aesthetics in Painting" published in 1979. Wu had studied with Lin Fengmian in Paris, so the challenge to the aesthetic of traditional Chinese ink painting came on this occasion from an advocate of modern abstraction. In the essay, Wu asserts that the ability to sketch objects directly from life is necessary but that artistic creation also requires more than "objective pictorialization" and the making of images by means of visual measurements and principles of proportion and perspective. He asserts that the problem is "how to represent" the object; and for this, the

[19] Galikowski (1988, p. 122).

[20] *Ibid.* (pp. 30–33).

[21] *Ibid.* (p. 31).

[22] *Ibid.* (p. 31). See also Li (1950, p. 39), "Gaizao Zhongguohuade jiben wenti", *People's Art,* 1950, No. 1, p. 39.

[23] *Ibid.* (p. 32). See also Mo (1954, p. 13).

[24] *Ibid.* (p. 33).

[25] *Ibid.* (p. 33).

artist needs to follow feeling and attend to formal qualities of composition and rhythm even to the point of "misconception" or exceeding the proportions observed in the object. The aim is subjective intervention and aesthetic feeling, so that the emotion results in the expression of the object's beauty.[26] In his own artistic practice, Wu abandoned a number of technical requirements associated with traditional Chinese brushwork, so that he could represent in painting the formal or semiabstract beauty that he observed directly on the spot in nature.[27] Wu Guanzhong sparked a lively debate in 1992 over the value of traditional Chinese painting, when he advanced the polarizing remark that "brushwork and ink equals zero!"[28] At issue was the traditional aesthetic of *bimo* (brush and ink) and more specifically the necessity of brushwork in ink-wash painting. Replying in defense of brushwork and the aesthetic associated with *guohua,* Wan Qingli (b. 1945) stated that without *bimo* there would be nothing left![29] Wu's point in the debate was that brush and ink are only tools for expressing the artist's emotion, a thesis resisted by advocates of traditional Chinese ink-wash painting. His provocative slogan was meant to gain attention for his long-standing aim of synthesizing traditional Chinese painting with a practice of modern abstraction that remained grounded in the observation of nature. According to Gao Ming Lu, Wu Guanzhong "believed that abstract beauty had existed in China since ancient times, in the elaborate literati landscape garden culture, calligraphy, the pursuit of pine tree form, and Qi Baishi's paintings."[30] The debate over the necessity of brushwork continued later that same year: Liu Guosong (b. 1932) asserted that modern ink painting has no need for brushwork, while Lang Shaojun argued that brushwork was essential for every kind of ink painting that remained Chinese in style.[31] Today, Wu Guanzhong and Liu Guosong are credited as influential figures who helped to transform *guohua* from within into what many Chinese art critics now call "experimental ink painting" (*shiyan shuima*)[32].

Ultimately, at least one lesson is suggested by disagreements over Chinese ink-wash painting that have at times led to a polarization, between arch traditionalists who resist all modifications and reformers who would abandon tradition entirely. One way to dissolve the polarization is to develop a new interpretation for rhythmic vitality (*qiyun*) that conveys how Chinese ink-wash painting provides authentic representations of nature without falling into mere abstract formalism or into realistic modeling and verisimilitude to physical things. The challenge for artists and critics today is to explain how the traditional idea of the authentic image may guide synthesizers and even experimental ink-wash painters to create art that is authentically Chinese. It is now the globalization of Chinese art that is guiding this long-standing debate and polarization over ink art toward innovative and constructive answers.

2.2 Globalization and Success: The Search for Chineseness

While debate continues among artists, critics, and curators on whether ink-wash painting remains at the core of Chinese art today, the globalization of contemporary Chinese art is changing the terms and direction of debate dramatically. As Liu Yuedi notes, the difference now is that the contemporary Chinese art world has passed through a "new context of globalization" during the years 1999–2008[33]. Many Chinese artists and especially those making conceptual, performance, and installation pieces are successful internationally with art buyers and curators. However, at the same time, the buyers' market sometimes hinders artists from making their own local assessments of what they themselves want to do. Some Chinese artists are pushed by these circumstances of success to ask *themselves* what is needed to make authentic contributions to world culture. Thus, as Liu puts it, the globalization of Chinese art is now accompanied by a search for what is called "Chineseness" or "re-Chineseness." The need for creative integrity motivates Chinese artists—including those who have entered the art market—to think about what constitutes authentic and indigenous Chinese cultural participation in the network of global art institutions. As a by-product of the search, we can expect new interpretations for the principles of traditional Chinese aesthetics that have guided Chinese ink-wash painters for a 1000 years. Thus, the link between global participation and re-Chineseness is important for our inquiry, because it puts Chinese artists and aestheticians on track to create balanced compositions that resolve the polarization—denial of reform or rejection of tradition—that has made the evaluation of Chinese ink-wash painting such a contentious issue.

The success brought to some artists through the globalization of contemporary Chinese art is evident. Many contemporary Chinese artists are now full participants in global art markets and institutions. It is impossible to regard the vibrant art scene in China as a mere reiteration of avant-garde

[26] Guanzhong (2010). For the original text see Guanzhong (1979a, pp. 33–35).

[27] Lu (2007).

[28] Shaofeng (2012, p. 35).

[29] Hearn (2013, p. 23).

[30] Gao (2011, pp. 80–81).

[31] Hearn (2013, p. 23).

[32] Wu Hung (2013, pp. 19–20).

[33] Liu (2011, p. 63).

phenomena initiated earlier in Europe.[34] This ascendency is marked by landmark shows, starting with *Inside Out: the New Chinese Art* (1998), and by signs such as the opening of the Chinese pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2003. The vibrancy of contemporary Chinese art is now firmly established. Artworks from China include oil painting and sculpture, installations and performance pieces, conceptual photography, and 3D digital video. The success is commercial, as marked by a much-publicized auction at Sotheby's in New York, during 2006, where final sales doubled some presale estimates.[35] Commercial recognition has come to experimental artists, such as Gu Wenda (b. 1955) and Xu Bing (b. 1955), who interrogate conventions of subject matter in traditional Chinese ink painting by creating intentionally illegible pseudo-characters in ink. Success has also come to painters associated with avant-garde styles in China: political pop and cynical realism. Two painters of the latter group, Fang Lijun (b. 1963) and Zhang Xiaogang (b. 1958), are well known now for the styles that they initiated in the 1990s. Although they continued a realist style, their emphasis on personal mood and portraits of family and friends was avant-garde and oppositional relative to the ideological content and grand political narratives of the official art of two decades ago.[36] Gao Minglu has described Zhang Xiaogang's series entitled *Bloodline: Big Family* (Fig. 2.1) as showing "inner emptiness in the face of the pursuit of individualism," within a late twentieth-century society turning toward consumerism.[37] Many foreign buyers accepted and supported these oppositional styles, because of the familiar pop theme of alienation amid material consumption, easily understood figures, and simple symbols that could be "granted political significance by westerners in accord with their understanding of Chinese politics." [38]

So, since the year 2000, many contemporary Chinese artists have entered a new phase of success in global markets. In general, this success has not yet reached Chinese ink-wash painters, who have remained, until recently, at the margins in Asian and Euro-American art markets. They have been positioned at the margins, partly because some art buyers have not thought of ink-wash paintings as representative of what is contemporary in Chinese art.[39]



Fig. 2.1 Zhang Xiaogang, *Bloodline: Big Family,* 1993

Some curators and critics point to the positive effects of independence and diversity that arise from full participation by contemporary Chinese artists in global art institutions. Liu Yeudi notes that the globalization of contemporary Chinese art has resulted in a new diversity and independence. Artists in China are no longer wholly reliant on support obtained by employment in the conventional academic system or from artists' associations funded by government offices.[40] Curtis Carter judges the inclusion of Chinese artists to be a sign of a much-needed "universal" visual language of icons and abbreviations. It initiates a period in which artists "develop new ideas for art incorporating their cultural histories and that of others."[41] His thought is that the wider range of artistic contributors will result in a pluralism that will enable curators of contemporary art to resist the sort of uniformity that characterized the International Style of the twentieth century.

Yet, there is general agreement that the globalization of Chinese art is a double-edged phenomenon that also produces new difficulties. There are concerns about autonomy, diversity, and the survival of local traditions, as buyers and curators together exert their influence on Chinese artists. First, there is concern over the influence of foreign buyers. In China, the styles of political pop and cynical realism belonging to the 1990s are still regarded as important success stories and a turning point in Chinese oil painting. Yet, today, they are also cited as examples of the way in which the interests of foreign buyers can easily shape the direction of contemporary Chinese art. Yi Ying asserts that the pop styles that some Chinese artists developed by 1992 were

[34] For a discussion of the ways that "Euramerican discourse" has at times devalued the authentic interface of Asian cultural energy with modernity, see Clark (1993, pp. 1–2, 5–6).

[35] Silbergeld (2009, p. 122).

[36] Wang (2010, pp. 12–13).

[37] Minglu, Wu. *Total modernity and the avant-garde in twentieth-century Chinese art,* p. 266.

[38] Ying, Yi. Political pop art and the crisis of originality. In *Subversive strategies in contemporary Chinese art,* p. 27.

[39] Silbergeld (2009, p. 125).

[40] Liu (2011, p. 66).

[41] Carter (2008, p. 84).

"commodities originally produced for export".[42] Second, there is the concern over loss of diversity within the monoculture of global art. Richard Vine warns that equal participation by Chinese artists in global art institutions since 2000 does not change the fact that this is still a merger with an "international monoculture" of museums, publications, galleries, and auction houses. Vine states that a common visual language used by this institutional monoculture makes contemporary Chinese art accessible to "[a]ny viewer familiar with today's visual lingua franca, derived primarily from Western avant-gardism of the turn of the last century…."[43] In effect, Vine agrees with Carter that there is a shared language of icons and abbreviations. But Vine's warning is that in practice, artists, critics, curators, and publishers still seem to restrict the criteria for today's common artistic language to a "Western avant-gardism" that stems from early twentieth-century modernism. This raises the question of whether those who uphold the so-called monoculture of global art continue to define "contemporary" in modern terms that no longer encompass the diversity of art in the present. The third concern is that of indigenous traditions. Liu Yuedi alerts us to some possible dangers for Chinese artists today, by noting cases where local artistic traditions have been lost. He cites the example of Bali, where local painters in Butuan ceased the production of indigenous art, after a different style was encouraged by visiting anthropologists. He also points to Brazilian artists who abandoned traditional styles to create marginally successful imitations of European art that were then misidentified as authentic and local. In his opinion, a possible danger for Chinese artists would be a situation similar to that of Brazil.[44] To underline the double-edged atmosphere that surrounds art production now, Liu Yeudi compares the situation in China during the decade 2000–2009 with that of the Western art world described by Arthur Danto in his *Encounter and Reflections* of 1989: "…while the engines of the art world turn furiously, the output has been aesthetically stalled for two decades, and if there is any direction to speak of, it is that of bad aesthetics…"[45]

Given these concerns about the loss of diversity, Chinese artists and critics have responded with heightened interest in what is now referred to as "Chineseness." Participation in global markets and a new international profile lead Chinese artists, as a matter of artistic integrity, to a question of actual practice: "what, if anything, makes contemporary Chinese art uniquely Chinese?" To make a genuine contribution to global art, it is necessary to search sincerely for what is authentically Chinese within indigenous cultural traditions. Thus, the call now is for a reconsideration of what constitutes a specifically Chinese contribution to global art that meets present needs of audiences inside China and without. As Liu Yuedi explains, a continuation of realist styles from 1978 to 1984 was followed by a movement toward de-Chineseness and the absorption of cultural influences from abroad—especially from America and Europe—between 1985 and the early 1990s. But after the loss of ethnic and cultural identities during the 1990s and the period of international success (1999–2008), "the idea of producing real 'Chinese' artworks has become fundamental to contemporary artists." [46] He adds that this quest for an ultimate neo-Chineseness takes place in the context of full acceptance of Chinese artists in the global art community.

This quest for Chineseness is a cause for caution according to some art observers. Is this search associated with a new nationalism opposed to the globalizing notions of pluralism, mutual participation, and sharing? Consider, for example, the conversation between the art critic Richard Vine and Wang Chunchen, curator of the Chinese Pavilion at the Venice Biennale of 2013. Vine grants that use of the term "Chineseness" arises now from a genuine sense of dislocation and "a whole people questioning themselves, saying 'who are we really'"; however, he also worries about a possible "subtext of old-fashioned nationalism."[47] Although he grants that conservatives do sometimes call "to have our own 'Chineseness,'" Wang Chunchen responds to Vine by emphasizing again the genuine indigenous need to investigate what portion of "Chineseness" remains after a century of development: "We can't find our past anymore. So when we seek this 'Chineseness,' we're asking really 'where is China?' The word 'Chineseness' doesn't just mean classic books, intellectuals, artists. We cannot say who or where the 'real' Chinese are."[48]

Some Chinese curators answer this concern by pointing out that the search for interpretations of "Chineseness" is not connected in any essential way to cultural exclusion or hierarchy. Liu Yuedi and Lu Hong insist that the clarification of the term "Chineseness," for the purpose of improving Chinese contributions to global culture, is consistent with pluralism and the ideas of tolerance and equality.[49] The new interest in Chineseness follows quite logically from the need of Chinese artists to contribute globally what *they themselves* regard as authentic artistic representations of Chinese life. There is no intention to privilege a point of origin (now China) and to

[42] Yi (2011, pp. 26–27).

[43] Vine (2011, p. 9).

[44] Liu (2011, pp. 64–66).

[45] *Ibid.* (p. 65).

[46] *Ibid.* (pp. 59–62).

[47] Wang (2013, p. 37).

[48] *Ibid.* (p. 37).

[49] Liu (2011, p. 74, 2012, p. 22).

de-privilege other societies and sites of reception (now Euro-America) as secondary. The thesis of compatibility—that cultivation of cultural difference and distinctness *coheres* with participation and contribution in a pluralistic global community—is well expressed by Wang Chunchen: "in the reality of confronting global cultural dialogue, it is necessary to emphasize our own cultural innovation and transformation more than ever before."[50] This is not a mere reversal of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Euro-American art discourses about Asia, where Asia was de-privileged and regarded as a secondary site of reception. In short, the working assumption of many contemporary Chinese artists and curators is that affirmation of Chineseness need not involve the formation of an identity that depends on a denial of diversity and reaction against some external cultural "other." On the contrary, many work from the premise that cultural or ethnic differences can be a resource for spreading and sharing moral and aesthetic principles of common appeal. Liu Yuedi puts it this way: "Take a building for example, the more national flavor it reflects, the more attractive it will be to the world."[51] (However, this leaves a manageable puzzle of interest to be addressed later on. If a Chinese artwork expresses thinking about self, nature, and moral harmony that is noticeably Chinese, then how can such thinking be absorbed, received, and appreciated by unique individuals abroad who are habituated to practicing other cultural traditions?)

Alexandra Munroe reassures us about the benefits of the search for Chineseness by showing her practical need as a curator for answers to the following questions: "What makes Chinese art Chinese, and who gets to decide?"[52] She clarifies the issue, by presenting two different works by Xu Bing: *Book from the Sky (Tianshu)* (Fig. 2.2) and some of his subsequent experiments in computer-generated imagery. She asks: Do both of these examples of Xu Bing's works qualify as Chinese? If we follow the conventional practice of using medium (ink, brush, and paper) and subject matter to make art historical classifications, then we find that *A Book from the Sky* contains ink, sheets of paper, and woodblock printed books that reference calligraphic forms. Thus, this installation by Xu Bing seems to qualify for placement in museum spaces that also contain classic paintings from the Northern Song (960–1127) or Qing periods. But Xu Bing's computer-generated images would fail to qualify if assessed on the medium-based definition. Hence, the computer-made prints would be artificially separated and exhibited as contemporary art, despite our awareness that Xu Bing's interest in questioning the reliability of language links the two.[53]



Fig. 2.2 Xu Bing, *Book from the Sky,* 1987–1991. Installation

Moreover, the differentiation of Chinese art on the basis of materials of composition does little to explain Xu Bing's interest in the indeterminacy of signifiers and his implicit criticism of relying too much on human knowledge and the sciences for finding one's way. Given these failures of the materials-based approach, Munroe calls for an aesthetics-based definition for "Chineseness" that can be applied to ink-wash paintings, computer art, and other mediums. Munroe holds that the aesthetics of Chinese ink painting can be the starting point for a creative interpretation that avoids any hierarchy of forms, genres or materials:

> As a curator working in a modern and contemporary art museum, I propose *an approach that focuses on the aesthetic principles of ink painting—not just the form*—and so to liberate "ink painting" from its particular borders to move more freely as an alternative platform of expression and mentality within the wider world of international contemporary art and thought. I am excited to see more and more Chinese artists moving freely between ink and other media, finding new worlds of expressive potential.[54]

Munroe does not offer a candidate for the content of this wider and more general aesthetic principle that is supposed to encompass artistic cases of Chineseness. Nonetheless, she gives us direction by suggesting that a closer analysis of the

[50] Wang (2013, p. 13).

[51] Liu (2011, p. 74).

[52] See Wang (2014, p. 17).

[53] *Ibid*. (p. 17).

[54] Munroe, Alexandra. *Reflections on CAFAM future*, p. 17. Italics mine.



Fig. 2.3 Jizi, *Between Sky and Earth*, 2009. Ink on paper, 184×145 cm

aesthetics of Chinese ink art may provide artists and aestheticians with some practical advice for crafting compositions or spaces that address the question "What is Chineseness?" Her remarks are enlivening because they predict that the aesthetics of Chinese ink painting can be a resource for generating a flexible principle for classifying a variety of contemporary art works and genres as authentically Chinese or expressive of Chinese thinking about what is most precious. Since the *aesthetic principles* that Munroe seeks are, by hypothesis, defined without limitation to particular forms, materials, or physical mediums, we may expect them to succeed as criteria for judging the Chineseness of oil paintings, videos, installations, performances, architectural spaces, and designs. An inclusive aesthetic-based principle of this sort, that points to what is authentically Chinese in a contemporary artwork, would also liberate ink-wash painters as well. For Chinese ink-wash painters could appeal to such a principle to ensure the Chineseness of their compositions, even as they experiment with form, formlessness, intentional illegibility, brushwork, or anti-brush techniques.

The point here is that the search for Chineseness provides a climate for creating new interpretations for the aesthetic principles of Chinese ink painting. This search also encourages careful study of *traditional* aesthetic principles that have been a guide for Chinese ink-wash landscapes. The investigation seeks to speed the development of the general aesthetic principle for Chineseness that Munroe anticipates by turning first to examine *traditional* Chinese aesthetics and the principle of rhythmic vitality. In effect, we shall examine present-day ink-wash paintings for signs of artistic choices made according to aesthetic principles linked to China's cultural past. This will provide evidence for an account of features that a contemporary artwork needs to exhibit in order to be indelibly Chinese. More specifically, the aim is to find new and accessible interpretations for the term "rhythmic vitality" that can be used with success to determine whether particular ink-wash paintings, pseudo-scripts, or other works of art are authentically Chinese. The interest in Chineseness suggests that confidence arising from the globalization of contemporary Chinese art is motivating a search for authenticity that brings Chinese artists full circle from the days of the May 4th movement of 1919, when revitalization of Chinese art was thought by some to require outright rejection of traditional Chinese thinking as a resource. Today, contemporary Chinese artists call upon aestheticians to catch up with the needs of the living by articulating some notion of Chineseness that can guide art making. The interrogation of traditional Chinese aesthetics is a means for assisting in this search for a contemporary Chineseness in design. New and creative interpretations for the principles of traditional Chinese aesthetics may enable us to transfigure ink-wash paintings—including those of the distant past—and to notice them anew.

2.3 "Chineseness" and Chinese Philosophy: Embodiment and Meanings

The task of describing what is specifically Chinese about contemporary Chinese art requires the development of new interpretations. Liu Yuedi describes the situation: "What is a good Chinese contemporary artwork? How to evaluate Chinese contemporary artworks? Chinese aesthetics and art theory must try to answer such questions."[55] This raises a key question of immediate relevance to our investigation of Chinese ink-wash paintings. Can Chinese aestheticians go straight to Euro-American or analytic-style philosophies of art to obtain frameworks that explain what is called the "Chineseness" of a give artwork? Liu Yuedi suggests they cannot. He holds that Chinese art must be about cultural expression indigenous to China, and he asserts that Chinese aestheticians must take differences with Western culture into account in order to describe what art is about in a traditional Asian context.[56] In one sense, Liu's conclusion is uncontro-

[55] Liu (2011, p. 71).

[56] *Ibid.* (pp. 71, 73).

versial: Chinese aestheticians who interpret contemporary Chinese art need to benefit from the thinking that is specific to Chinese philosophies already within the heritage of world literature. But Liu Yuedi clearly favors making the additional assertion that Arthur Danto's analytic philosophy of art cannot explain what is unique to Chinese art and how it is about practices indigenous to Chinese culture. Thus, the globalization of Chinese art and the search for Chineseness leads us to ask whether or not analytic philosophies of art are able to describe the way in which some Chinese artworks articulate their meanings. Mary Bittner Wiseman recognizes the question and asks whether "Western conceptions of art, supposing as they do a chasm between art and nature raw, can be adequate to China at the turn of the new century."[57] This important issue requires special initial attention.

Chinese aestheticians who aim to interpret "Chineseness" face a challenge not unlike the one that confronts contemporary Chinese artists. When does synthesis with features from Euro-American philosophies advance to the point that Chinese aestheticians lose their ability to refer to a uniqueness of sensuous existence that is precious to Chinese philosophical heritage? The absorption of influences from abroad is on some occasions useful and on others an obstacle. Some Euro-American philosophies may be useful for creating new interpretations for Chinese aesthetics. For example, Arthur Danto's definition of art is widely influential and has remained relatively stable for three decades: "something is a work of art when it has meaning—is about something—and when that meaning is embodied in the work—which usually means: is embodied in the object in which the work of art materially consists."[58] As an aesthetician in China, Liu Yuedi accepts and uses Danto's two necessary conditions for art: "Once Chinese contemporary art adopts these two criteria, it must be about something."[59] To give another example of a benefit, some modern philosophies from Europe express the idea that there is a realm beyond direct observation by means of sense experience and, therefore, beyond human knowledge. For example, Immanuel Kant asserts: "what necessarily forces us to transcend the limits of experience and all its appearances is the *unconditioned,* which reason, by necessity and by right, demands in things in themselves."[60] With his notion of "a thing which is not to be thought of as object of the senses but as a thing in itself," Immanuel Kant defines a *noumenon*.[61] Even speculative thinking such as this may stimulate instructive comparisons with Chinese references to "the realm" of Dao, despite many differences between these two cultural spirits. The idea of a realm beyond direct human acquaintance may help us later, when we evaluate Jizi's claim that the purpose of his ink art is to convey a greater universe that is beyond the dimension of appearances and physical phenomena. Yet, the live question raised by Liu is whether exclusive reliance on analytic philosophy and Danto's definition of art results in a disregard for language that is needed to describe the way in which Chinese ink paintings are about what is present and precious. The question is this: do analytic philosophies of art have limitations that prevent them from providing Chinese artists with instructions for making artworks that express Chinese cultural thinking about self and nature? Liu expresses strong reservations about the adequacy of Danto's definition of art.

What bothers Liu Yuedi about Danto's philosophy of art is Danto's denial that there are any differences between Asian and Euro-American works of art that might lead to the conclusion that his definition of art is somehow too narrow. For Liu, it is plain that there are some distinguishing differences specific to any Asian artworks that express an aesthetics indigenous to Asian art worlds; he suggests that these features are overlooked in analytic philosophies of art. By contrast, Danto discounts the importance of Asian art and aesthetics, in the sense that he denies that they point to any difference that would reveal some failure in the definition he provides. Li Yuedi offers the following quote from conversations with Danto as evidence of his denial:

> The definition of art as embodied meaning was meant to be true of every work of art, wherever and whenever it was made. If there are differences between eastern and western works of art, they cannot be part of art's essence. The difference between western and non-western does not apply. What we have learned since 1981 is not part of the theory."[62]

Danto's purpose with this passage is to assert that contemporary Chinese philosophy offers no interpretation, as yet, that shows his definition of art as "embodied meaning" to be exclusive or too narrow. He grants that different world cultures produce artworks that differ in meaning and material composition. What he denies is that the expression of different meanings challenges his contention that all artworks do embody one meaning or another. Liu accepts Danto's two-part definition, but he continues to insist that a problem still arises because Danto's theory "turns a blind eye to the differences between Eastern and Western cultures."[63] What then is the exact source or cause of Liu's discontentment? The problem may be clarified by interpreting his objection as follows: Asian art and Chinese artworks provide meanings about an embodiment that Danto cannot describe. To put this another way, Asian artworks convey meanings about

[57] Wiseman (2007, p. 109).

[58] Danto (2013, p. 149).

[59] Liu (2011, p. 71).

[60] Kant (1929, p. 24).

[61] *Ibid.* (p. 271).

[62] Liu (2011, p. 73).

[63] *Ibid.* (p. 73).

embodiment interpreted in a second way that Danto cannot describe, because he hitches his definition of art to an analytic philosophy of art that is ontologically committed to describing nature and embodiment in terms of object languages and material things. Ultimately, Liu's objection may be that Chinese artworks are about some elements of embodiment personally manifesting within the unique sensuous existence of the individual human being that are not experienced as any of the material things that Danto claims art is about.

Does Liu Yuedi persuade us that Danto's definition of art presupposes the Euro-American art world and that it overlooks some differences in Asian art and aesthetics that are essential to the success of describing the Chineseness of Chinese art? Liu's critique is plausible enough, so it is necessary to regard it from the start as a live hypothesis that requires further study. For the moment, the plausibility receives support from a statement by Danto himself: He grants that there is a duality in the way he interprets his own definition of art. On the one hand, there is the domain of meaning where art consists of a level of cognizance; and on the other, there is the realm of embodiment defined by real things, material objects, and events. Danto concedes this bifurcation in a telling statement: "It is possible to be an idealist with regard to art and a materialist with regard to things…"[64] He himself emphasizes this tendency to define embodiment exclusively in terms of material counterparts and real things. So, when he describes the transformative power of art, he refers to the emergence of a new cognizance about some configuration within the set of material things. The transformation at the level of meaning is always ultimately in cognizance *about* particular objects and things in the domain of material events. As Noel Carroll has noted, Danto's framework can handle anything, as long as the work is about something and "embodied in a form that Danto can explain successfully in terms of the way it articulates its meaning or content (or aboutness)."[65] If our investigation eventually shows that some Chinese ink-wash paintings convey meanings about some element of embodiment that cannot be interpreted in the ordinary way as a material object or event, then it would follow that some cases of Chinese ink art articulate (or exemplify or represent) an embodied aboutness that Danto cannot handle. Another way to establish a limitation in analytic philosophies of art would be to find that the principle of the authentic image mentioned in traditional Chinese aesthetics is defined in terms of an element of the painter's or viewer's personal embodiment that is not experienced as an object or material thing. Thus, we have reasonable cause at the beginning of our investigation to suspect that Danto's account of art may not be perfectly adjusted to handle the pluralistic culture of global art that now includes participation by Asian artists who may seek to express an authentic union with embodiment that is within the awareness of individuals belonging to indigenous or local Asian cultures. Whether Liu's doubts are upheld will depend on whether we find that traditional Chinese aesthetics meaningfully points to an element of embodiment that is precious in Chinese painting heritage and not a material object. In short, our overall aim of upholding the value of Chinese ink-wash painting is inevitably linked both to the search for Chineseness and to critical questions about the limitations of analytic philosophy.

The chapters to follow seek to uphold a new experimental interpretation for the authentic image in traditional Chinese ink-wash paintings by developing the idea of an intimate and nonobjective embodiment that the individual person possesses and witnesses directly. The hypothesis here is that Chinese ink paintings qualify as authentic images of nature, precisely because they contain images of the individual person's embodied union with a sensuous existence that is more elemental than any of the cognitive understandings of things mentioned in our conventional discourses about natural phenomena. Thus, our direction here is strongly in keeping with Mary Bittner Wiseman's important insight that the quest for Chineseness today must go to a level of the body present for the traditional Chinese painter, who works to create a rhythmic vitality that resonates with the natural world.[66] Yet there is one difference worth mentioning. Although Wiseman persuades that some contemporary Chinese artists work with the body "at a level below that of discourse," it is important to keep in mind that there may be a level of embodiment deeper even than the level that Wiseman refers to as the material body and "its gestural repetitions."[67] In the end, our inquiry here suggests that the making of an authentic Chinese ink painting gives the painter an awareness of an embodied union with nature that is more basic than the level of perceptual experience of physical things, gestures, and material counterparts. The idea here is that images that are authentic in a Chinese sense are about an element of observable embodiment that is neither matter nor a spatiotemporal gesture.

2.4 The Chapters: Jizi and His Art

How shall we proceed to develop an aesthetic principle that can be used to assess whether a case of contemporary Chinese art is an authentically Chinese representation of actual life in the present? Once again, Liu Yuedi offers direction: "Perhaps a mature Chinese art theory and aesthetics should be developed from information reflecting Chinese artists' practices and ideas instead of just following Western

[64] Danto (1981, pp. 82, 104, 125).

[65] Carroll (2013, p. 25).

[66] Wiseman (2011, p. 216).

[67] *Ibid.* (p. 119).

definitions of art."[68] Or, as Mary Bittner Wiseman has written, "one should watch, so far as one can, the art-making process."[69] In short, if our aim is to construct an aesthetic principle for assessing whether an artwork makes an authentically Chinese contribution to global art, then we need to begin with the actual practices and ideas that particular Chinese artists communicate to us. By taking this path, we stand a better chance of avoiding any distortions and limitations that might creep in, when we rely too much on conventional philosophies of Euro-American origin.

With the third chapter, this inquiry moves to Jizi and examines some of his experiences, practices, and ideas. The complexity of Jizi's path is suggested by the three names he has used: Ji Zhaoxiong in his childhood home of Longguan, Wang Yunshan after his mother's move to Xuanhua, and finally the name Jizi as a professional painter since the 1990s. The name of "Jizi" is thick with referents: Early days as Ji Zhaoxiong, Ji Chongli's son, the Ji family, teacher Ji, and agents of Chinese culture, such as Ji, a hero of culture in the mythological days of the Zhou Dynasty (1100–221 BCE). First, Jizi's life is considered, together with the historical circumstances that positioned him outside the training offered by art schools. The narrative conveys the qualities of perseverance and dedication that have contributed to Jizi's independence and sustained creativity. Second, there is the cataloging of Jizi's own statements about his purpose and use of traditional Chinese aesthetics. Most important in this regard are his writings and remarks about art. He describes how his paintings address philosophical questions about the way in which the individual person is related to nature and the universe. Specifically, these writings refer to the unification of microlevel dimensions of personal observation with macrolevel dimensions of a greater universe. While he acknowledges the influence of the writings and paintings of Jing Hao (c. 855–907) and Shitao (1642–1707), Jizi provides his own present-day account of his paintings and how they express traditional Chinese philosophical teachings in original ways. Some questions remain: What do his paintings actually look like? How original are they? What compositional features make them unusual? These questions are answered in the next chapter, where Jizi's paintings are compared with those of the wider community of contemporary Chinese ink-wash painters.

The emphasis in Chap. 4 is upon Jizi's artistic development and compositional choices over the past several decades. His paintings are compared mainly with the work of three other contemporary Chinese artists: Jia Youfu (b. 1942), Liu Guosong (b. 1932), and Xu Bing (b.1955). The first step is a discussion of Jizi's paintings from 1964 through 2009. His paintings are distinctive and unconventional, in that his compositions depict the interrelationships between four different dimensions: the visible, the phenomenal, the astronomical, and the cosmic. Careful examination shows that two distinctive compositional features emerge with his creation of the *Dao of Ink Series* of 2009. First, Jizi uses the pictorial device of continuous contours to enclose interior spaces that display natural phenomena, formlessness, or both. Second, he organizes the various individual interior expanses or "cells" into a web of differing dimensions, where each interior is both separate and interlocked with the others. The comparison with other ink artists shows that Jizi's paintings do address questions and issues of interest to the community of contemporary Chinese ink artists. His works are unique: He is a neo-traditionalist and synthesizer who manages to express the themes of abstraction, constructed cosmos, monumental landscape, and ink as a medium.[70] By combining these diverse categories in his compositions, he expresses novel thinking about the interrelatedness of different dimensions of existence. However, we need to develop a principle of aesthetics, so that we can assess whether Jizi succeeds in his aim of making compositions that express self in unification with nature as described in Chinese aesthetics. Moreover, we need to answer the question of whether his paintings are about a unification with nature that is expressed in Chinese aesthetics but not in analytic philosophies of art. Thus, if we are to judge whether Jizi paintings work as he intends, it is necessary to consider and evaluate them with an interpretation developed from an examination of traditional principles of Chinese aesthetics.

The subject of Chap. 5 is Jing Hao's essay *Bi fa ji* (*Notes on Brushwork*). This classic text of traditional Chinese aesthetics is relevant for our investigation, because it states clearly that a realistic style of resemblance to the appearances of real things in nature is only the first of two different functions possible for the image contained in an ink painting. The text suggests that a good Chinese ink-wash painting must exhibit a second mode of pictorial representation based on the aesthetic principles of "vitality" (*qi* 氣) and "resonance" (*yun* 韻). To express these two principles, an ink painting must contain an image that is "authentic" (*zhen* 眞) or a true representation of nature. The ink-wash image is authentic or true to the vitality or liveliness of nature only after the painter passes spirit or vitality through "substance" (*zhi* 質). To clarify the notion of the authentic image requires then that we interpret "substance" within the context of the text. To arrive at an account of the substance manifested by an authentic image, this chapter offers an analysis that moves step by step from Jing Hao to Li Zehou, from Roger Ames and David Hall to Stanley Murashige, and finally from Stephen

[68] Liu (2011, p. 74) Italics mine.

[69] Wiseman (2011, p. xxvii).

[70] Kuo (2012, pp. 26–28).

Owen to Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Ultimately, it offers an experimental interpretation for the authenticity of the ink-wash image that may be used to assess whether a contemporary artwork is authentically Chinese. The proposal is to interpret the meaning of "substance" (*zhi*) by means of the term "the visible" (*le visible*) that Merleau-Ponty uses to denote what he calls a "texture" or "thickness" of the seer's own innate embodiment that precedes the perception of things.[71] This notion of a private field of the visible seems to cohere with Li Zehou's claim that the sensuous existence of the individual person is utterly unique.[72] In the end, we arrive at a hypothesis for a contemporary aesthetic principle that can be used to assess whether a given work of contemporary Chinese art is an authentic representation of the sensuous existence that gives the individual person an awareness of unification with visible nature. The authentic image is one that resonates with an embodiment of a different sort, namely, the texture or general atmosphere of visible space that is both constitutive of one's own innate corporeality and also the ground that displays natural phenomena and real material things. The idea that the visible is constitutive of one's own corporeality is persuasive, given that the visible is inseparable from the display of sensuous existence within the two sense organs that are one's own eyes. Given this experimental reading for the authentic image, we acquire a standard for assessing Jizi's paintings.

Using this interpretation for images that are authentic or true to the liveliness of nature, we can begin in Chap. 6 to assess whether Jizi's paintings succeed as authentic representations of the unification of self with nature and a larger universe. We find that some of his paintings display images that depict the dimension of an enclosed interior visible field by which the individual painter or viewer observes nature directly. For example, his *Dao of Ink Series No. 10* of 2009 (Fig. 4.13) pictorially represents how the utterly unique individual is in union or fusion with nature and alongside six other unique neighbors. Paintings such as *Infinite Land* (Fig. 4.16) show how each unique interior visible field interlock interlocks with other dimensions of the larger universe. Through a comparison with Guo Xi's (c. 1020–1090) painting *Early Spring* (1072), it becomes clear that Jizi paintings express a philosophy of self in relation to nature that is suitable for the present and not merely a return to the neo-Confucianism that emerged in the Five Dynasties (907–960) and became fully manifested in the Northern Song period (960–1127). The comparison between Jizi's *Nebula Series* (2011) and Piet Mondrain's *Tableau I: Four Black Lines and Gray* (1926) suggests cultural differences with respect to the way each painter interprets a larger universe beyond direct observation by the individual person.

Finally, Chap. 7 presents some conclusions about the value of contemporary ink art and the role of traditional Chinese aesthetics in guiding it. First, we arrive at an interpretation for the traditional Chinese aesthetic principle of the authentic (*zhen*) image that manifests the passage of spirit (*qi*) through substance (*zhi*). When "substance" is defined by the term "visible," we can explain the unification of an eyewitness with nature as immersion in a private field of the visible that implies a larger invisible universe beyond. Second, with this account of unification, we can explain how Jizi's recent *Field of Soul Series* (2013) helps heal the soul by depicting an inescapable union of self with nature and universe. His work qualifies as social commentary and aims at the betterment of the community of sentient beings; for example, he addresses such issues as globalization, displacement, fractured cultures, and the faultiness of the "clash of civilizations" hypothesis. These paintings help us consider the preciousness of actual life, a new paradigm for union with nature, and a reminder that life contains challenging obstacles as well as unities. Third, since the authentic image is defined by display and resonance with the intimate space of the *texture of the visible,* Jizi's images are about a visible field prior to the perception of things; so, they cannot be handled by Danto's definition of art that mentions mainly the dimension of material objects in human experience. Fourth, our interpretation of the authentic image is form-independent and available for assessing the authenticity of any contemporary Chinese artwork or installation displayed by eye, as long as the design manifests the visible atmosphere that animates life and makes it corporeal for the individual viewer. Therefore, we can assess Jizi's paintings as authentic images of the liveliness of nature, and then the same principle can be applied to determine the authenticity of other works by Xu Bing, such as *Book from the Sky* (Fig. 2.2) and *Landscript* (Fig. 4.34). Fifth, we can expect the meaning of such terms as "avant-garde" and "art history" to change. If the terms "contemporaneity" and "avant-garde" imply opposition to official discourses, and if the authentic image implies contact with a visible field that is not experienced as a material event, then Chinese ink-wash paintings with authentic images of nature may express contemporaneity and count as avant-garde in opposition to conventional late-modern philosophies of materialism. With regard to art history, our results provide the basis for a reply to James Elkin's contentious claim that art history is a Western project. Chinese ink paintings containing authentic images display a style of visible space that is generally recessive in Euro-American cultures. If Chinese ink-wash paintings display a dimension of nonobjective and substantial space (*zhi*) that Danto's account cannot describe, then it is impossible and arbitrary to regard art history as primarily a modern and Euro-American project.

[71] Merleau-Ponty (1968, p. 135).

[72] Li (2010, p. 224).


咬定
青山

Who is Jizi?

3

Jizi provides us with an opportunity to observe, how one artist combines life experiences with an awareness of traditional Chinese aesthetics to create distinctive artistic compositions of great originality. By selecting one artist for careful study, we follow the call to create new interpretations for Chinese aesthetics from the actual practice of Chinese artists. In asking "Who Is Jizi?" we have two initial avenues to explore: the practical circumstances of Jizi's artistic growth and his statements on art, philosophy, and Chinese aesthetics. First, we may consider details of the circumstances that propelled Jizi on a path of unusual independence, self-discipline, and creativity. His independence and self-cultivation have contributed to his originality; yet, his artistic practice has always been shaped by his participation in everyday events. The second step is to clarify Jizi's own claims about the guidance he receives from Chinese aesthetics. He uses the language of Chinese aesthetics to articulate what he regards as his guiding principle: the use of painting to show the unification of self with nature, others, and a larger universe. These two topics—the circumstances of Jizi's self-cultivation and his writings on Chinese aesthetics—are the starting point for an analysis of Chinese aesthetics and how it guides Chinese ink-wash painters who seek to meet the needs of audiences inside China and elsewhere in the world.

3.1 Practices: Circumstances and Self-Cultivation

The story of Jizi's growth as an artist is intertwined with the historical circumstances that have helped to shape his life. Born 7 years before the founding of the People's Republic of China, Jizi had to rely often on his own resources of creativity to develop his skills as a painter and to sustain his artistic purpose. His wide range of personal experiences have kept him in constant connection with historical events. This is not the life story of a recluse: It is a life of self-cultivation that remains inseparable from daily affairs, routines of labor, and political policies. By reviewing some stages of Jizi's growth as an artist, we acquire a firm sense of how the struggles of the living have never been far from his practices and experiments in ink painting. Since contingent events positioned him from an early age at the fringes of art institutions, he has had to answer for himself the question of purpose: What is most important and worthy of expression when recognition from others may never come? Events have positioned Jizi at an intersection between faithfulness to Chinese painting heritage and the necessity to invent from his own unique and authentic place of connection with nature.

3.2 Longguan

Jizi was born in *Longguan,* a small town in the Hebei province, in 1942 (Fig. 3.1). Early on, he displayed an interest and talent for art, and one of his earliest memories is drawing with charcoal made from the fireplace at home. Noticing his talent, his grandmother encouraged him. His father, Ji Chongli (Fig. 3.2), was first a teacher and then principal at the nearby high school. In later years, Jizi learned from an uncle both that the Ji family was at that time one of the four largest in Longguan and that his grandfather had worked as an accountant for the local Qing government. Skilled in calligraphy, Ji Chongli gave Jizi, then named Ji Zhaoxiong, personal instruction in brush-and-ink technique; for the steel pen was at that time already replacing the brush at school and work. Jizi recalls a scroll with calligraphy hanging in a hallway of the family house, so it is likely that his father collected calligraphy and possibly paintings. Less than a mile away from the family courtyard stood the Great Wall, a favorite spot in those days for collecting firewood. Still standing today is the Pagoda of Reclaimed Light that was originally part of a Buddhist monastery built during the Tang Dynasty (Fig. 3.3). Jizi recalls balancing and climbing on its outside ledges, much to the worry of grown-ups below. Because of his skills in writing, Ji Chongli was asked by a local government official in the late 1940s to serve on occasion as a recording secretary for the Guomindang municipal council.

D. A. Brubaker, C. Wang, *Jizi and His Art in Contemporary China,* Chinese Contemporary Art Series,
DOI 10.1007/978-3-662-44929-5_3, © Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg 2015



Fig. 3.1 Longguan in the 1930s

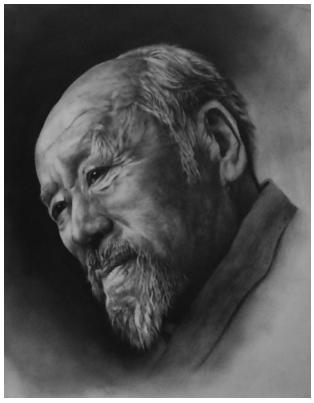


Fig. 3.2 Jizi, *Portrait of Ji Chongli*, c. 2005. Charcoal on paper



Fig. 3.3 *Pagoda of Reclaimed Light,* Ming Dynasty. Longguan, 2013

He agreed reluctantly, recorded the minutes, but was never a Guomindang party member. Events in Longguan after 1949 propelled Jizi on a path of enforced independence and continuous self-assessment.

Between 1950 and 1952, in the early years of the People's Republic of China, local cadres initiated campaigns against counterrevolutionaries. Mainly because of his work as a recording secretary before 1949, Jizi's father was imprisoned for 83 days while his case was investigated. In the end, there was no sign of counterrevolutionary activity, and he was released. Even so, Ji Chongli was barred from all positions in standard work units and compelled to labor under supervision, without receiving conventional benefits for himself and his family. He cleared streets and collected waste each morning from chamber pots in neighboring houses on his street. Although he had a small plot of land, he was not very good at growing vegetables, so Jizi would help tend the garden. They also raised pigs for resale to support the family. But how should the pigs be fed, when the family had so little to eat? They created swill, by collecting discarded water from shopkeepers who made bean curd. At the local school cafeteria, one cook who knew the family's situation would out of kindness occasionally slip some food into the scraps for the pigs. Jizi continued to study in school.

This difficult situation for Ji Chongli and his family became much worse with the full emergence of the Anti-Rightist campaign of 1957. The Anti-Rightist campaign must be understood in the context of the Hundred Flowers Movement and the policy of relaxation that began a year earlier, in May 1956. The relaxation was designed to reform bureaucracy, promote efficiency, and speed the development of culture and economy. Artists and writers were encouraged to rely on their own professional expertise, and plans for 1957 included a reformed Artists' Association with free debate among artists and even small group exhibitions where any artist could obtain a slot more easily. However, the critique of bureaucracy turned occasionally into debate about principles. As early as November 1956, Mao Zedong announced plans for a concurrent rectification campaign aimed at those who questioned political policy. As Maria Galikowski puts it, the official reaction against intellectual criticism voiced in

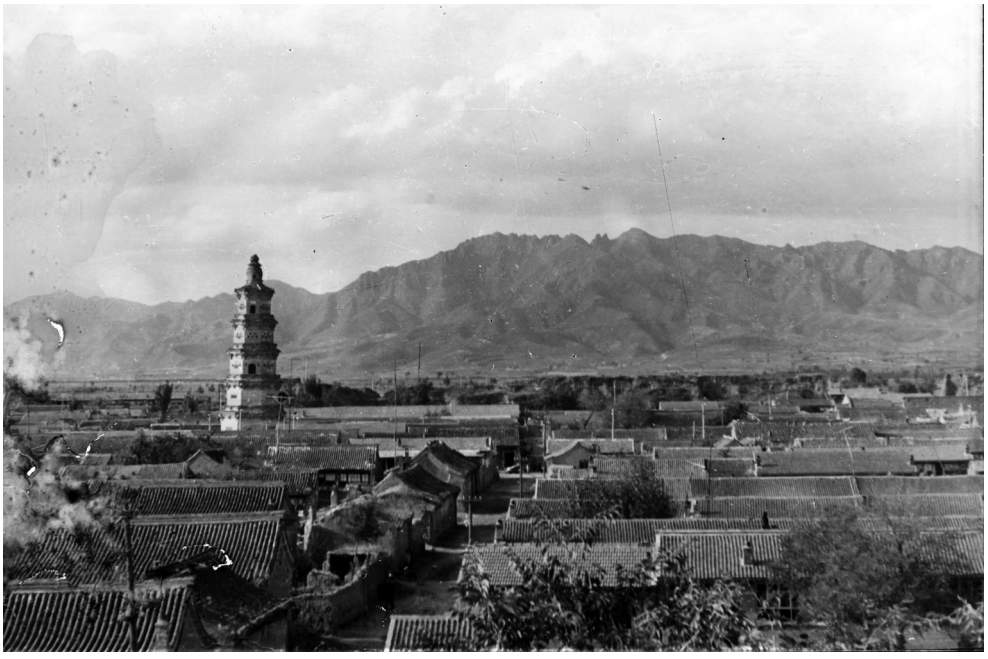


Fig. 3.4 Longguan, Hebei Province, in the 1980s

the period of "blooming" became an occasion for criticizing "the class nature of intellectuals as a social group."[1] By July 1957, the campaign against revisionism was in full swing and national in scope. Thus, many who had answered Liu Shaoqi's national call to think independently, creatively, and critically, with the aim of improving efficiency, soon found themselves criticized as Rightists.

Ji Chongli was caught up in the Anti-Rightist campaign despite his clearance by investigators in 1950 and his marginal existence afterwards. Nearly everyday, after completing his mandatory labor, he would go and report to a meeting at a neighborhood official's local office, kneel, and listen to people denounce him. This pattern continued month after month. Finally, late in 1957, during the middle school winter holiday and a visit to his sister, Jizi received an urgent message to return to the family house in Longguan. His mother told him: His father had hanged himself at home. Jizi's father left a handwritten will for Jizi, on a cheap piece of paper: "Last words written before my death: Be filial to your mother, love your younger brothers, and do not quit schooling." In describing these events, Jizi says that he speaks of terrible things but that in his heart he is calm. Thus, two early conditions helped to shape his path in the years and decades to follow: his father's background and his father's request that he continue schooling. One served as an obstacle on his path of professional development; the other inspired and sustained Jizi for years of determined self-study.

Jizi's remaining middle school years became a mixture of achievements and obstacles. For example, Jizi excelled in middle school. At his teacher's request, in 1958, he joined a small group of 7 or 8 students who were to help teach the officially assigned lessons to others in a large class of 50. Before long, someone charged this group of student helpers with teaching on their own and for counterrevolutionary activity. Officials from the local government and public security arrived and gathered the class of students together. Under pressure to identify some person as responsible for such dangerous activity, one of the student helpers cited Jizi's father, despite the fact that Ji Chongli was gone. Even Jizi was compelled to declare his independence from this supposed influence. In the end, the school expelled two students, while Jizi and some others were punished with bad records in their school files. To this day, Jizi does not know who made the charge or why. After this, he was given the worst seat, where reflected sunlight made it impossible for him to read the chalkboard and to answer questions directed frequently and pointedly at him by the new teacher. Yet, Jizi received encouragement from other corners. Liu Kejian, a literature teacher at Jizi's middle school, read Jizi's middle school essays to students in other classes at the school. So, classmates gave Jizi the nickname "great writer." Finally, when the time came to take the examinations required for entry into high school, Jizi asked if his family history and the student-helpers incident would disqualify him. The school principle answered that Jizi could take the exam, saying that school officials cared only about Jizi's own personal principles and not his family history. At the examination, many students turned in an empty or "white paper" exam: they did not write anything down. Guided by strong resolve and his father's request that he continue studying, Jizi completed the exam carefully. Afterwards, Jizi was one of only two students who were not accepted for high school. When he went

[1] Galikowski (1998, pp. 68–69).



Fig. 3.5 Longguan vista, 2013

to inquire, the principle simply handed Jizi a certificate for completing middle school and made no comment. Jizi never learned of his marks on the exam. Without the results of an entrance exam, Jizi was effectively blocked from entering high school and following the conventional path to higher education and professional development.

Today, the houses in Longguan from Jizi's childhood of the 1940s and 1950s are now rare. They have been replaced by newer and more spacious structures of brick with satellite dishes perched here and there for connection with the larger world (Figs. 3.4 and 3.5). The original site of Jizi's family house is now obscured by a paved parking lot, flanked by high-rise buildings that extend out to the main commercial street (Fig. 3.6). Jizi places the site of the house near the foot of a new communications tower for Longguan (Fig. 3.7). In a very real way at the local level, some portions of familiar physical evidence of Jizi's hometown have vanished in the building booms of recent decades.



Fig. 3.6 Street in Longguan, 2013. Jizi's family home was between the high-rise buildings on the left



Fig. 3.7 Jizi visits his hometown, July 14, 2013

3.3 Xuanhua

Jizi's mother Zhou Fengrong moved the family to her hometown, the larger Xuanhua, after he finished middle school. By October 1959, she remarried, this time to Wang Peizhen, a cook and Communist Party member. So, Jizi changed his family name from Ji Zhaoxiong to Wang Yunshan. No high school would accept him, since he had no entrance exam to show. Then, too, there was the student-helpers incident in his middle school file. So, at this time, Jizi made a resolution that was to guide him in the decades to come: Since he could not gain entry into high school, he would continue to learn through self-study and honor his father's request. The

pattern was set for years to come: after work by day, he continued to read and practice painting at night. In a fortuitous turn of events, Liu Kejian, the literature teacher who encouraged Jizi's in Longguan, moved his family to Xuanhua. His younger brother, Liu Keren, who had enrolled at the Hebei Academy of Art (now the Academy of the Arts), would return home to Xuanhua and share with Jizi fundamentals learned about art and Chinese landscape painting.

Jizi noticed that the College of Steel Engineering at the city of Baotou in Inner Mongolia was accepting applications from students with middle school certificates. The program of study was for 5 years instead of the usual three. So, in the spring of 1960, he and a good friend, He Zhongyi, left Xuanhua for Baotou and enrolled as students majoring in electronics and automotive power. Using their drawing and painting skills, they both became well known throughout the school for painting official school messages and announcements. The two tried to gain admission to the local art school in Baotou, but they lacked the required identity card proving local residency. Before long, a maternal uncle, unhappy that Jizi was so far away and taking up engineering, helped Jizi's mother with an inventive plan to ensure Jizi's return. Jizi soon received a telegraph: "Your mother got sick and is seriously ill. Come home." So, Jizi returned immediately, after spending just 6 months away! Missing Jizi and lacking such a telegram, He Zhonyi soon made a getaway, by leaving in the middle of the night for the train back to Xuanhua. After 3 years, the college closed, and the students were sent to schools throughout northern China to finish their degrees.

For the years 1961–1963, government policy concerning employment changed due to reversals in the economy caused by natural disasters and difficulties with implementing the Great Leap Forward. Individuals could apply for a permit or license to do odd jobs, run small businesses, or work as independent street venders. Looking for ways to develop his artistic skills, Jizi showed some sketches and was accepted as an apprentice for a work unit of artists producing portraits in charcoal. After staying several months to pick up new techniques, Jizi set out at age 18 to make a living by selling portraits made from life or photographs and by engraving the names of clients on ink pens. He made a sample portrait of Qi Baishi to advertise his own skills and kept this original portrait drawing in his possession until the first years of the Cultural Revolution (Fig. 3.8). In an attempt to increase sales, Jizi began to travel by train to other cities in Hebei and Inner Mongolia. After a while, he was accompanied again by He Zhongyi, who had quit a less adventurous factory job of painting pieces of porcelain. Jizi continued his self-study, during this period as well. After making realist charcoal portraits during the day, he practiced traditional landscape painting technique at night, sometimes with the aid of a used copy

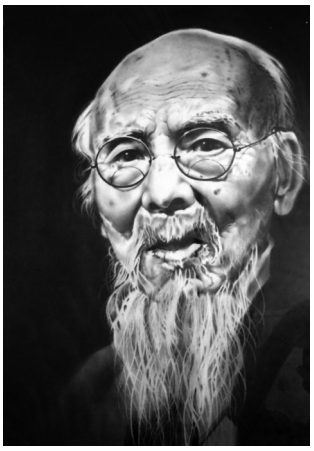


Fig. 3.8 Jizi, *Portrait of Qi Baishi,* Original 1961. Redrawn in the 1980s. Charcoal on paper

of the classic *Mustard Seed Garden Manual* that he discovered in a grocery store. He also visited treasures of Chinese landscape painting at the Palace Museum, in Beijing. Riding the night train, he would arrive in Beijing early in the morning and wait for the doors of the Forbidden City and the Palace Museum to open. After the closing bell at 4 p.m., Jizi would buy ink, brushes, high-quality rice paper, or books before taking the night train back.

In 1963, with an improved economy, the policy of licensing small independent entrepreneurs was discontinued. Jizi's life changed yet again. It was no longer possible to do the independent wandering jobs, such as charcoal portraits on the street. Those in need of employment would now go to a labor bureau for official assignment as temporary contract workers without benefits to established work units. Temporary workers who proved their worth over several years could have some hope of obtaining a fixed position that would come with normal benefits and services. So Jizi began a series of jobs: carpenter, bricklayer, railway worker, steel worker, art glass designer, and maker of mirrors. Covered with coal dust on his first day at the rail yard, he was sick for the next 7 days. Trying again, he worked for a year and a half breaking rocks at a cement factory, until he became ill with duodenitis. Still ill after 3 months, he received a letter of discharge. The labor bureau staff instructed Jizi to go home and rest; they offered no job. So, newly married to Yang Xiuying and now with a son, Jizi had no way to support his family. Yang Xiu. ying supported the family by doing temporary contract work as a road builder.

During this period, Jizi did find a way to enter one of his paintings in a public exhibition. The local Artists' Association in Xuanhua needed more entries and invited talented amateurs to exhibit works for an exhibition to be held in 1964. So, Jizi submitted an ink painting in traditional landscape style,



Fig. 3.9 Jizi, *Visiting An Old Friend On His Farm,* 1997. Original destroyed 1964. Ink on paper

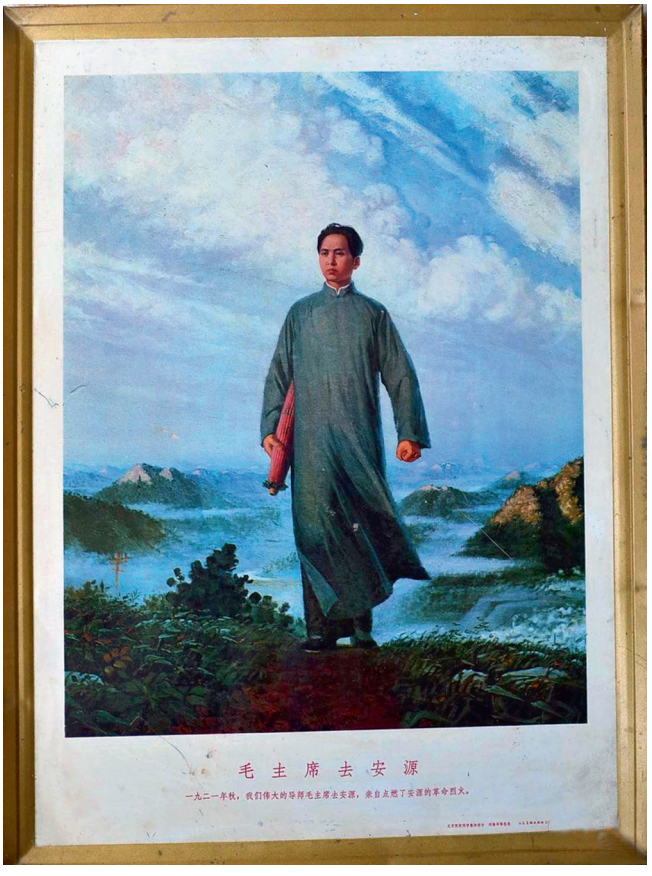


Fig. 3.10 *Mao visiting Anyuan,* c. 1968, poster

on the subject of the classic Tang poem by Meng Haoran, "Visiting an Old Friend on His Farm" (Fig. 3.9).

> My old friend's prepared a meal of chicken and millet,
> And invited me to join him at his farmhouse.
> The village is surrounded by green trees,
> Blue hills slope up beyond the city wall.
> The window opens onto the vegetable garden,
> Where holding wine, we talk of mulberry and hemp.
> We are looking forward to the autumn festival,
> When I'll return to see the chrysanthemums bloom.[2]

The two friends are barely discernible near the center in a tiny pavilion surrounded by trees, vast mountains, and waters. The exhibition went well and as planned, with the exception of one particular art critic who wrote a harsh and negative review in the local newspaper. According to this critic, Jizi's poetic landscape was upholding feudalism, because the subject matter of the painting was confined to social relations among a privileged landowning elite. At the close of the exhibition, Jizi removed the painting and burned it. When a reporter from the local newspaper came by to see what the controversial painting looked like, Jizi said that it was already destroyed. What else could one do with such a painting, after it was publically attacked so fiercely as feudalistic and counterrevolutionary? In 1997, Jizi recreated the painting of 1964, at the suggestion of a friend and writer.

One question is this: Why did the critic launch such a pointed attack in 1964? Knowledge of the vacillation in

[2] "Visiting An Old Friend On His Farm" by Meng Haoran, Tang Dynasty Poet. DMOZ Open Directory Project www.dmoz.org.

official policy with regard to traditional Chinese landscape painting may help to explain the unexpected harshness of the art review. Some scholars argue that the start of the Cultural Revolution can be placed as early as Mao Zedong's Socialist Education Movement of 1963. By June of 1964, Mao charged explicitly that nearly all the cultural associations and art journals developed in China since 1949 did "not reflect the socialist revolution and socialist construction."[3] Yet, the relatively relaxed climate of 1961–1963 was quite in keeping with Jizi's choice of a grand and poetic landscape on the theme of friendship. In 1961, for example, Ni Yide wrote an essay in the journal *Chinese Literature* affirming the natural beauty of Pan Tianshou's *Bathed in Dew* that showed lotus flowers rising in the mist.[4] The following year, in an issue of *Chinese Literature* commemorating the 20th anniversary of Mao Zedong's Yan'an Talks, Wu Zuoren (1908–1997), argued that the value of traditional landscape and bird-and-flower paintings lies in their capacity to address and express the cheerful attitude that laboring people have toward nature, even though such paintings may not directly reflect politics.[5] But with the turn of 1964, the editors of *Fine Arts* began to increase the number of paintings depicting soldiers, workers, and peasants.[6]

During 1964, after recovering his health and some months of waiting, Jizi was assigned by the labor bureau as a contract worker to a steel mill in Xuanhua. Jizi worked at the forge by day and pursued self-study of ink painting at night. As red-hot blanks of steel were pulled continually from the furnace, a full-time worker would make a new tap and Jizi would pound the spot in a rhythm repeated throughout the day. Still hoping to change his status to that of a fixed worker with benefits, Jizi continued in this way for 2 years, until 1966. Mao Zedong's "May 16th Circular" of that year criticized "reactionary thinking in the academic field, the media, publishing and the arts" and launched the Cultural Revolution.[7] Jizi recalls a change in the daily rhythm at the factory. Before laboring at 8 a.m., all workers spent an hour at "early reporting" that included instructions for the day, reading of excerpts from the writings of Mao, and the circulation of newspaper reports. At 5 p.m., the closing time, the workers would again gather immediately to report on their own personal thinking during the day. The aim was to fight against deviations (or revisionism like that in the Soviet Union) and privately motivated or self-centered thinking by the individual worker. When workers split into factions, they invited Jizi to join. He declined, citing his status as a temporary worker who had the aim of feeding his family that now included his mother, his wife, and two sons. Accepted as a bystander, he would play the flute during breaks for his work unit, in accompaniment to the singing of a women assigned to a machine nearby. Toward the end of 1966, Jizi fell ill again; this time with hepatitis. He was instructed to return home to recover. Once again, Yang Xiuying kept money coming in, with her work as a road builder. Although he began his recuperation by completing more ink-wash landscapes, Jizi was moved before long to burn family photos, papers and some of his art books, paintings, and drawings, including the original charcoal portrait of Qi Baishi from 1961. Jizi worried that they might be seized and cited as evidence of counterrevolutionary activity. Even Qi Baishi's tomb and Xu Beihong's Commemorative Hall were attacked during this period by Red Guards.[8]

3.4 Red Flag Commune

During the first years of the Cultural Revolution, many people would gather with drums, banners, and portraits of Mao Zedong to announce his thoughts and writings. To prepare for the annual celebrations of October 1st, members of the Red Flag Commune in Xuanhua sought to commission a painter for the creation of ten large portrait images of Mao. The Commune was an independent work unit composed of diverse and talented people who, for one reason or another, did not go to college or did not meet the requirements that the labor bureau set for contract workers. Commune members could hire temporary workers directly without mediation of the labor bureau. Always on the lookout for ways to develop his artistic skills, Jizi applied and received the commission. When his portraits on well-built frames of wood survived even fierce gusts of wind on October 1st, he impressed members of the Commune and was invited to join. With his well-developed skills for portraiture, he soon proposed that the Commune create a special work unit for painting images of Mao on the walls of nearby factories. After a successful test case, in which he confidently created a huge image of Mao at the Commune, Jizi took the offer of mural painting to a factory in Xuanhua that processed food. Since the workers there already knew of his local reputation as a portrait painter, they commissioned a huge mural to be painted in oil. Since the Red Flag Commune provided only enough money to cover the cost of several brushes, Jizi used his own brushes and paint to ensure that this first experiment in outside contract work would succeed. He completed the head and face, his friend Xie Hongwen filled in surrounding areas, and a third person from the Commune (a house painter) completed the expanse of sky. The finished product—a scaling up of a poster of Liu Chunhua's *Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan*(1967)—was a huge success, to everyone's surprise (Fig. 3.10). Soon, many factories placed orders for

[3] Galikowski (1998, pp. 68–69).

[4] *Ibid.* (p. 116). See also Ni (1961, p. 100).

[5] *Ibid.* (p. 118). See Wu (1962, pp. 102–105).

[6] *Ibid.* (p. 122).

[7] *Ibid.* (p. 139).

[8] *Ibid.* (p. 144).



Fig. 3.11 Jizi, *Bringing Up the Water to the Top of the Mountain,* 1972. Cover *Hebei Journal of Literature and Arts,* 1973

murals of Mao Zedong painted by Jizi and the team from Red Flag Commune.

In 1972, Mao Zedong called for workers to follow the successful model of irrigated farming conducted at the Dazhai village, where water pumped upward flowed down into a series of terraces for growing rice. Jizi created a painting, *Bringing Up the Water to the Top of the Mountain,* with this call in mind (Fig. 3.11). The painting is a fascinating mixture of traditional Chinese landscape and a realistic depiction of successful engineering for increasing agricultural production. In effect, Jizi affirms the requested social content, while continuing many features of traditional Chinese landscape painting. The point of view is one that Guo Xi might describe as "high distance," since both the waterpipe that bridges the space between mountains and the human crowd with banners appear far below and much smaller in scale. On the strength of his work at Red Flag Commune, officials of the Artists' Association in Xuanhua invited Jizi to exhibit *Bringing Up the Water.* The painting was reproduced in a small catalogue, and Jizi's painting was recognized as outstanding at a gathering during the exhibition. What he did not find out until later



Fig. 3.12 Jizi, *After Qian Songyan,* 1970's. Ink and color on glass

was that visiting officials were so impressed with *Bringing Up the Water* that they selected it for the cover of the 1973 issue of the *Hebei Journal for Literature and the Arts.* How did he find out? During an unrelated business trip to faraway Tianjin, he looked by chance in a bookstore window and saw a familiar image! He went inside, confirmed that it was his painting on the cover, and bought the last two remaining copies in the store. One more ripple completes the story. Someone from Xuanhua called the publisher of the *Hebei Journal for Literature and the Arts:* Did they know about Jizi's family background? When the publishers called Red Flag Commune to inquire, the managing party secretary for the entire commune happened to answer the phone and stated firmly that he was interested only in Jizi's personal principles and commitment, which had been thoroughly proved. The emphasis at the time was on the need to defeat nature for social benefit. Jizi recalls a particular slogan: "Fight nature, sky, earth, men! It is enjoyable!"

Throughout the 1970s in Xuanhua, while working at the Red Flag Commune, Jizi learned the craft of making mirrors and painted landscapes on glass (Fig. 3.12) for sale in the Commune's store. He experimented with various techniques for frosting or grinding, so that prepared glass could be sold as a special material to local ink-wash painters. By the end of the decade, he initiated an artistic theme that he still contributes to today: the *Ice and Snow Series* (Figs. 3.13 and 3.14). Because of the change in attitudes that accompanied the opening of 1979, it was possible once again to make paintings that emphasized the poetic and lyrical qualities of



Fig. 3.13 Jizi, *Ice and Snow Series,* the late 1970s



Fig. 3.14 Jizi, *Ice and Snow Series,* the late 1970s



Fig. 3.15 Jizi, *High Purity,* 1984. Ink and color on paper

landscapes and flowering trees. One notable achievement in this series is *High Purity* of 1984 (Fig. 3.15).

When *High Purity* was exhibited at the Artists' Association in Xuanhua during 1984, some people in the Association found faults. As Jizi recalls the event, some stated: "The icicles are like tears. You must be unhappy with society." Such criticism could perhaps be regarded, in part, as an echo of the short-lived spiritual pollution campaign initiated at the end of 1983, in which some members of the Artists' Association advised against strange forms and self-expression.[9] However, members of the Art Workers' Society liked the painting immediately. They made arrangements to include *High Purity* in a national exhibition of paintings by workers to be held in neighboring Shanxi province. At the national exhibition, people remarked, "The pine with icicles is so nice!" (Fig. 3.16 detail). The local newspaper gave favorable reporting. In the end, the leader of the art workers'society in Xuanhua told Jizi that he had represented Hebei well.

[9] *Ibid.* (pp. 234–235).



Fig. 3.16 Jizi, *High Purity,* 1984. Detail

Still in Xuanhua, Jizi initiated a second ongoing series toward the end of the 1980s: the *Dao of Ink Series* (Figs. 3.17 and 3.18). Slowly through the 1980s, he developed an increasing interest in both Daoism and Buddhism, and this contributed to his thinking on the theme of the unification of self with nature and the universe. According to Eugene Wang, during this period of the 1980s "reform-minded artists were experiencing a 'spiritual' turn: deepening soul-searching in the post-Mao era led to metaphysical reflexivity."[10] However, it would take many years of experimentation with technique and composition to achieve the pivotal successes with *The Dao of Ink Series* of 2009. Along the way, during the 1990s, he began to use the professional name "Jizi," since some nationally known Chinese painters were already using the name "Wang Yunshan" (Figs 3.19–3.21)

What can we infer from these life stories? One difficulty for Chinese artists at the present moment of the globalization of Chinese art is the loss of internal balance that comes with the pressure or temptation to follow what buyers and curators want. As Jizi puts it today, his background circumstances freed him from this danger; he was forced to choose for himself what his purpose would be. In a sense, he developed a strong practice by relying on his own thinking and feeling to assess and constantly question how he could improve or advance. Forced by circumstances to rely on self-instruction and his own method, he arrived at an original integration of styles characteristic of an individualist. In order to appreciate the content of Jizi's thinking and ideas, we need to proceed with our second step and to consider Jizi's own interpretations of traditional Chinese aesthetics and the value of its application.

[10] Wang (2012, p. 24).



Fig. 3.17 Jizi, *Dao of Ink Series,* the late 1980s

3.5 Ideas: Aesthetics and Picturing Unification

By asking "Who Is Jizi?" we also wish to learn about the aesthetic principles and fundamental ideas that guides his practice. His writings express his purpose succinctly: "What I seek is the unification of Heaven, Earth and humanity; insight into Dao, the material universe, and myself."[11] In conversation, Jizi acknowledges that his path of practice is influenced, in part, by the writings and paintings of both Jing Hao (c. 855–c. 907) and Shitao (1642–1707).[12] Indeed, as the aesthetician Gao Jianping shows, traditional Chinese aesthetics is filled with references—from Su Shi (1031–1101)

[11] See Jizi, Reflections on Art, No. 1.

[12] Interview with Jizi, January 3, 2013. Beijing.



Fig. 3.18 Jizi, *Dao of Ink Series,* the late 1980s



Fig. 3.19 The center of Xuanhua in 2008



Fig. 3.20 Jizi and friends visiting his old house, Xuanhua, July15, 2013



Fig. 3.21 David and Jizi looking at paintings, 2013

on Wen Tong (1019–1079) and bamboo, to Shitao on his own oneness with mountains—to the observation of nature and the painter's awareness of inseparable union with it.[13] Yet, Jizi asserts that his paintings differ and make a significant contribution because they place more emphases on the spirit and dimension of the universe as a whole than on scenery and experiences of natural phenomena: "Our artistic predecessors embodied the eternal existence of this spirit of the universe through their own personal experiences, but this spirit was definitely not expressed in their artworks."[14] This reflection suggests that some Chinese landscape painters in the past have clearly developed an awareness of the vitality of a larger universe through their experiences, without trying to represent this connection within the images of their paintings. For example, Shitao writes of a oneness that precedes the emergence of phenomena, but he continues to make paintings that tend to emphasize things, scenery, mountains, and waters. What Jizi describes for us is a program of compositions that picture multiple and intertwining dimensions of space, without privileging the dimension of human experiences of natural phenomena.

[13] Gao (2012, pp. 314, 350).

[14] Jizi, Reflections on Art, No. 50.

By gathering Gao Jianping's remarks on traditional Chinese aesthetics, we can establish a basis for assessing continuity with Jizi's own statements about his purposes and aims. As Gao Jianping tells us, the notion of spiritual union applies both to walks for the purpose of observing nature and to the act of putting brush and ink to paper or silk. After collecting comments by Chinese painters and critics, Gao's conclusion is as follows: To achieve communication with nature, the painter forgets the self—especially the physical self—and "should contemplate nature in order to reach its true spirit." Continuing, Gao adds that this forgetting is "to transform the self that exists in daily life into the pure self of the painter."[15] As a painter, one becomes part of nature, and nature becomes part of oneself. As for forgetting oneself during painting, Gao points to Su Shi's poem about Wen Tong. The famous poem merits repeating:

> When Yuke (Wen Tong) painted bamboo, he merely saw bamboo and did not see people. Not merely ignoring people, vacantly, he forgot his own body. The body was transformed in concert with the bamboo. Inexhaustibly, the pure and fresh images appeared. Zhuangzi is no longer living in the world, so who can understand such spiritual concentration?[16]

This passage suggests that suspension of perceptual experience of the physical embodiment of things leads to a transformation and change from one interpretation of embodiment to another. Wen Tong's ordinary awareness of his body turns instead into an awareness of his own embodiment as inseparable from the bamboo. Zheng Yunchao gives a similar report: "When I put brush to paper, I forget whether I become the katydid or the katydid becomes me."[17] To this, we may add Shitao's statement about mountains: "They are in me, and I am in them."[18] Again, the painters who make these claims leave many questions about the medium through which this awareness of inseparability comes about. Even Shitao's images do not stress the primacy of the transition between "forgetting" to perceive physical objects and the awareness that his own embodiment is fused with bamboo. Instead, his lively paintings often provide images of a subject matter that is generally recognizable as appearances and shapes of mountains, waters, and flowers.

Jizi's original contribution results from his artistic aim of conveying the unity of the various dimensions of the universe as a whole. His stated aim is to represent a multiplicity of interconnected dimensions: the observable, the phenomenal, the materially astronomical, and the cosmic. His purpose is clear: "what is most important is to make paintings that convey the 'how' of union."[19] Given the terms of Gao Jianping's account just mentioned, we can say that Jizi's aim is to make pictorial representations that show how *the pure self comes to awareness of its own union both with nature and the larger universe.* Jizi describes the breadth of the unification: "The harmonious unification of subject and object is just the unity of the human and Heaven."[20] This latter statement confirms his intention to convey a unification that has two stages. First, there is a unification of self this occurs when the opposition between subject and object (inner mind and external matter) is replaced by a unifying awareness of the oneness of self with existing nature. Second, there is the unification of the dimensions of material phenomena with a larger universe that is beyond direct observation. Jizi gives clear articulation of these two dimensions in the following statement, although this time he refers first to the universe as a whole and then to the standpoint of the individual person:

> When I was creating the Dao of Ink Landscapes, I wanted to grasp and embody "the spirit of the whole" from the macroscopic level. On a microscopic level, I wanted to show "the qualities of objects." In other words, I was seeking mutual agreement between a macroscopic exploration of the Dao, and a microscopic exploration of the real. The Dao indicates the universe's eternally unchanging natural spirit in operation. "Real" indicates the authentic qualities of physical images, and not the reality of the natural shapes that appear before one's eyes….[21]

This passage makes clear reference to two dimensions and the aim of depicting their unity. First, with respect to the most local or microlevel of the painter, Jizi's purpose is to show unification by depicting an authentic dimension of nature and not merely the shapes and forms that it exhibits. Although the passage above does not make the point explicitly, the microlevel of self in contact with observable nature is presumably where the painter's pureself undergoes a transformational awareness of embodiment that results in a sense unification with nature (i.e., with bamboo, katydid, or mountain). Second, there is also a clear reference here to a larger macrolevel universe. To convey the unification of these two dimensions in one painting, it is necessary to use new schemas for space and for multiple dimensions of the universe. It requires strengthening the surface tension of Jizi's paintings, so that they retain a "power to shock" and hold the viewer's interest in the theme of unification. With such compositional "shocks," Jizi seeks to prevent the viewer from becoming absorbed merely in the details of the dimension of phenomena and landscape, or merely with the perceiving planetary spaces and the deep distance in the universe. Given these statements of intention, we are ready to approach his paintings and to ask whether Jizi's compositional solutions depict the various stages of unification that he outlines.

Do Jizi's paintings of the unification of self, nature, and universe meet the needs of the living? Jizi claims that they do. It is not enough to picture the transformations of self

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[15] See Gao (2012, p. 388). For more discussion of Gao Jianping's account, also see Brubaker (2011, pp. 250–251).

[16] *Ibid.* (p. 314).

[17] *Ibid.* (p. 278).

[18] Coleman (1978, pp. 76, 126).

[19] Interview with Jizi, Jan 3, 2013, Beijing.

[20] See Jizi, Reflections on Art, No. 1.

[21] *Ibid.*, No. 11.

that accompany unity with nature and the universe. It is also necessary to explain how these unifications are transformative and beneficial. In this regard, he cites the analysis and artistic practice of the modern Chinese writer Lu Xun (1881–1936) as an inspiration. Trained as a medical doctor, Lu Xun changed his specialization to writing: the Chinese people had an illness of the soul or spirit that required attention. Jizi claims that his paintings have a similar purpose: art has a harmonizing effect, when it brings awareness of a larger universe that includes both the dimensions of material phenomena and also the soul of the individual person. Comparing Lu Xun's efforts with words to his own work in painting, Jizi states that his subject matter does include the soul: "The idea is to help people think more about their soul or mind—spirit—not just the physical…. If you can understand this kind of union between the human, nature, and the world, you will not destroy nature. You will be in harmony with society."[22] The point is that ink painting can have social value, when it conveys the awareness of the inseparability of human beings—and individual selves—from nature and the universe. As a result, it remains for us to develop aesthetic principles that are capable explaining how Jizi's paintings help people arrive at an awareness that the soul is united with nature. One task ahead is to find principles of aesthetics that can be used to assess whether Jizi depicts the unification of self, nature, and universe in a way that strengthens the soul of each individual person living in the present.

Jizi's paintings emphasize the soul in a way that provides healing answers for such difficult philosophical questions as the problem of many religions and the content of religious experience. He claims that without the inspiration of Daoist notions of the grand universe and Chan Buddhist notions of immediate enlightenment, there would have been no *Dao of Ink Series*.[23] He regards his paintings as open to interpretation from the standpoint of different religions or philosophies (e.g. Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist). However, his images of unification, shaped as they are by his reflections on these three sources of Chinese cultural heritage, are not expressions of any one doctrine in particular. Instead, he thinks of his artistic depictions as satisfying a basic need for unification of self with the universe that all religious traditions attempt to answer, despite their many differences. Hence, his aim is to represent a connection with the universe as a larger unity beyond the limits of the world of material phenomena and without restriction to the distinctive codes, dogmas, and iconography of any one religion. The highest realm of art is the one that affirms a principle of unification at such a macrolevel: "the artist grasps the spirit of the existence of this principle of the universe, and then artistically expresses this spirit of the universe."[24] Thus, it is possible to suggest the hypothesis that Jizi intends to express a philosophy of religious pluralism, because he implies that there is one ultimate whole or unity with a multitude of different and equally authentic human responses or experiences of it.[25] Some contemporary Euro-American philosophers of religious pluralism struggle with a weak link in their account; they have difficulty describing the medium of the individual person's direct and authentic contact with the one ultimate unity and its existence, without favoring the doctrines or codes of one religion over the others. Thus, given Jizi's artistic purpose of aiding each viewer to acquire awareness of a larger and ultimate realm of Dao, it can be argued that his aim is to use *images* to present a philosophical answer concerning the element or medium that *does* provide each individual person with unique and authentic contact with a larger universe beyond human experiences of particular things.

Jizi's intentions reveal a project of great interest. His aim of conveying the "how of union," or a picturing of the unification of self with nature and the universe, amounts to an artistic response to difficult philosophical questions. He is concerned with the means and mediums that promote the unification of mind with matter, soul with body, the visible with the invisible. Moreover, he reopens the question of how each of us observes our own unique self in union with nature, things, and others. Thus, Jizi's ink paintings must be considered as a contribution to the search that Liu Yuedi describes as "re-Chineseness": the exploration for new interpretations for Chinese aesthetics that will explain the notion of the painter's "pure" self that observes its own inseparable fusion with nature. For this contemporary project, late-modern Euro-American philosophers seem unprepared. In analytic circles, it seems, either "self" has been eliminated from discourse or else little progress has been made since David Hume's eighteenth-century claim that he "never can observe anything but a perception" and always fails to catch evidence of himself.[26] Finally, we can expect that Jizi will express the transitional awareness of unification with nature by means of images that shock us out of our habitual expectations of perceiving things and material phenomena.

Having considered some of Jizi's life experiences and his statements about art, there remains the question of what his paintings actually look like and how they compare with those of his contemporaries. Are Jizi's compositions distinctive and original, when we compare them with the work of other Chinese contemporary ink artists who seek to make specifically Chinese contributions to global culture? This will be our task in the chapter to follow. After that we can take up the question of whether there is a contemporary interpretation for a specifically Chinese aesthetics that will enable us to assess whether the compositional features of Jizi's paintings express the unification of self, nature, and universe, in keeping with his intentions.

[22] Conversation with Jizi, April 29, 2013. Beijing.

[23] Conversation with Jizi, Jan 3, 2013, Beijing.

[24] Jizi, Reflections on Art, No. 1.

[25] See especially Hick (1985, pp. 40–41).

[26] Hume (2002, p. 803).



Paths of Contemporary Chinese Ink Art

4

Given Jizi's statements of intention, what do his ink-wash paintings actually look like? How do his works and concerns compare with those of other contemporary Chinese ink artists? Put another way, the question for us is whether Jizi's art contributes to a community of artists who have similar interests in upholding an indigenous Chinese aesthetics, depicting the unification of self with nature, and expressing spiritual contact with a larger universe beyond observable phenomena. He takes a clear series of steps to arrive at his *Dao of Ink Series* of 2009. These stages of development bring together four features: spatial reversals or interchanges of figure and ground, enclosed interior expanses, multiple dimensions, and interlocking areas. After studying this progression to a culminating style of interlocking dimensions with differing interiors, we can consider his work in relation to three Chinese artists at work today: Jia Youfu (b. 1941), Liu Guosong (b. 1932), and Xu Bing (b. 1955). With the aid of art historian Jason Kuo who offers a vocabulary of useful artistic attitudes and categories, we have a manageable framework to guide our analysis. The comparison reveals that Jizi combines a wide range of ink-art styles and practices: continuation of Chinese-style landscape, synthesis with Euro-American styles, and experiments with ink and paper that result in artworks that are intentionally unreadable as symbols that refer to understandable things. His compositions are unorthodox because they display closed contours, interchanges of space, and fragments of diverse dimensions that combine features of traditional Chinese painting, modern abstraction, and the anti-writing exhibited in some contemporary installations of Chinese ink art.

Before proceeding with the analysis of Jizi's compositions, we should start with a clear idea of the attitudes and stylistic categories that Jason Kuo introduces for interpreting particular works of contemporary Chinese ink art. Kuo suggests that present-day Chinese ink artists can be described according to three different attitudes: neo-traditionalist, synthesizer, and interrogator. For Kuo, "neo-traditionalist" refers to those who use brushwork and ink wash in ways that affirm traditional *bimo* (brush and ink) aesthetics. The term "synthesizer" points to artists who combine Chinese painting with non-Chinese styles from abroad. He uses "interrogator" to denote those artists who inquire about the role and relevance of ink as a medium in Chinese culture and about its physical properties. Finally, in addition to these three attitudes, Kuo develops a parallel vocabulary of useful terms that refer to features of compositional style: "reconstruction of traditional aesthetics," "abstraction," "constructed cosmos," "monumental landscape," and "investigation of ink as a medium."[1] This overall framework enables us to observe, assemble, imagine, and test a variety of possible stylistic combinations and configurations. Kuo assigns the three attitudes—traditionalist, synthesizer, interrogator—to Jia Youfu, Liu Guosong, and Xu Bing, respectively. He finds that both Jia Youfu and Liu Guosong contribute to the genre of monumental landscape. At the same time, Jia adheres more closely to a traditional *bimo* (brush and ink) aesthetic, while Liu creates a synthesis of brush and ink with modern Euro-American styles such as abstract expressionism and pop art. At the same time, Liu Guosong is correctly matched with the category of constructed cosmos, for he is well known as a pioneer in joining of style of monumental landscape with the deep distance of moon and planets. Xu Bing is described correctly as an artist who interrogates the relevance of Chinese ink arts, given his experiments in wood-block printing, calligraphy, and landscape painting. To explore the power and limits of writing, Xu Bing makes pseudo-texts in an imaginary Ming dynasty typeface and landscape paintings where scenery gains shape from Chinese characters (Figs. 2.2).

What do we find by comparing Jizi's compositions with those offered by Jia Youfu, Liu Guosong, and Xu Bing? There is a first conclusion here: Jizi's compositions both affirm and depart from traditional Chinese landscape painting because he combines different stylistic features characteristic of the other three artists. Like Jia Youfu and Liu Guosong, Jizi is a painter

[1] Kuo (2012, pp. 26–27).

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Fig. 4.1 Jizi, *Epic of Nature,* 1994–2009. Ink on paper, 90 × 4000 cm (in part)

of monumental landscapes. Yet, he differs from them both, because he places the dimension of mountains experienced by human observers side by side with the constructed cosmos of distant planets and stars. Some of Jizi's compositions disrupt comprehension of recognizable things by emphasizing a pictorial expanse that is intentionally illegible; therefore, his artistic practice is in line with the experiments of interrogators. As the analysis of Xu Bing's work shows, some contemporary Chinese ink artists who investigate the medium of ink extend their anti-writing from the making of pseudo-characters to a more radical intentional illegibility defined by vistas that include images of formlessness. For the moment, our purpose is to catalogue and compare the compositions achieved by this small sampling of four Chinese ink artists. Whether Jizi's compositions are successful expressions of his philosophy about the unification of different dimensions will be the subject of the following chapter.

4.1 Jizi's Paintings: The Path to *Dao of Ink*

What do Jizi's compositions look like? If we look at his work since the 1990s, we notice a gathering of different realms: the rhythmic phenomena of nature, human travelers among mountains, Tibetan monasteries, meanderings of the Great Wall, planetary events, galactic swirls, and multiple perspectives that are sometimes interlocking. His ability to combine these differing realms and dimensions goes hand in hand with long experimentation concerning technique and composition. To Chinese ink-wash painting of mountains and waters, he adds an innovative dialogue with modern Euro-American art. Jizi shows familiarity with the original motives for abstraction: anti-illusionism and integrity of immediate surface. With the *Dao of Ink Series* of 2009, he goes on to create a style of edges and contours that produces interlocking expanses or enclosed wholes composed of interior images. Using this device to depict separate dimensions that are at the same time interlocked, he proceeds to juxtapose some enclosures that display interior images of first-person acquaintance with nature alongside others that display the deep distance of a larger universe. Each dimension has its own place as a fragment that contributes to the universe as a whole.

We can begin our survey of Jizi's recent work with the long panorama entitled *Epic of Nature* (1994; Fig. 4.1), a work that initiates the energetic rhythms and motifs that culminate in the *Dao of Ink Series* of 2009. We find in this early painting visible movements and recognizable events such as swirling waves, flame-like mountains, wispy clouds, and distant horizons. There is a pulsating power evenly discharged throughout, and it is noteworthy that Jizi has added sections to *Epic of Nature* over many years. In *Holy Light* (2001) (Fig. 4.2), it is as if he continues the narrative regarding nature by moving closer to inspect the earth and one of the distant horizons engulfed by the torrents of energy that sweep through *Epic of Nature*.



Fig. 4.2 Jizi, *Holy Light,* 2001. Ink and color on paper, 69 × 69 cm

After the year 2000, he moves in even closer: his paintings show details of snow and ice, the Great Wall, and travels in Tibetan terrains. There is often a Tibetan Buddhist monastery or stupa along an implied footpath of ascent; these signs of spiritual habitation and practice appear below and at a distance, midway up, or perched far above. The painting *Om-ma-ni-ba-mi-hum No. 4* of 2002 (Fig. 4.3) shows tiny humans winding their way to the light, with a Tibetan monastery floating high above and to the left in a gaseous sea of mountains. With this particular title, we are brought closer



Fig. 4.3 Jizi, *Om-ma-ni-ba-mi-hum No. 4,* 70 cm×69 cm, 2002

to the original Sanskrit wording for the jewel and the flower that represent Buddhist practice and wisdom. In his evaluative essay, Gao Congyi stimulates our thinking. Why does Jizi represent both the Great Wall—so physically close in Hebei—and also the Tibetan landscapes as so distant? Perhaps the answer is that contemporary life leads to a long and ongoing journey of struggle for the wisdom symbolized by the Tibetan motifs, no matter where one lives. For Gao, frozen landscapes such as *Snowy Great Wall* (2003) (Fig. 4.4) that show meanderings of the Great Wall are signs of following "the way" for answers. As Wu Hung notes as a curator, the wall has generated differing traditions of interpretation; in modern times, Sun Yat-sen described it as a symbol of protection from invasion and a future China of strength, while the writer Lu Xun stressed the suffering of those dispatched to build it.[2] Jizi's imagery connects imaginatively with the symbol of the wall and its name in Chinese, "Long Wall" (*Changchen*): cultural tradition traverses many obstacles on a long path of practice toward wisdom.

The theme of searching or traveling toward a hoped-for destination does seem evident in *Dialogue* (Fig. 4.5) where two yak gaze with upraised eyes at the dimension of snow-flaked mountains high above.

Gao Congyi argues convincingly that these ice and snow paintings exhibit Guo Xi's second or "high distance" approach to painting mountains: a looking up from the base of a mountain to the peak. Such paintings symbolize the question of where spiritual mooring is to be found and perhaps Jizi's arrival in the foothills of a place that offers refuge.[3] Yet, arrival in the foothills of a terrain of spiritual refuge is just one phenomenal dimension of activity, and there are other dimensions of unification related to the connection of self with nature, others, and universe. Thus, in this same period, Jizi pulls back away from human habitation to show the textures of terrestrial snow mountains in relation to a larger stellar and cosmic whole. In *Snowy Moon Afar No. 1* and *2* (2003), powerful peaks and gorges rotate downward into the dimensions of moon, planets, and stardust (Fig. 4.6).

The year 2007 marks both a continuation of the theme of spiritual progress (Fig. 4.7) and a novel move to synthesize the medium of Chinese landscape painting with the crisp geometric shapes of twentieth-century Euro-American abstract and nonobjective art. Geometric circles, segments, disks, and pockets of dense uniform darkness begin to appear in Jizi's art. Some circular edges represent moons or planets, while others are clearly meant to suggest optical instruments or mediums for looking that contain images inside. Some magnifying disks express the theme of the individual person who makes microlevel observations by means of an interior medium with an integrity of its own. Some disks present a unified interior area that displays forms resembling the appearances of physical landscapes outside. Specifically, *Clean World* (Fig. 4.8) and *Paramount Cosmos* (Fig. 4.10) both contain disks that can be described as microlevel optical mediums. Each painting presents a disk that encloses an optical whole suggestive of an inner expanse that displays forms and patterns roughly resembling the external landscape of mountains, gorges, waters, or orbiting worlds. *Clean World* also displays a long progression of individual disks that appear to overlap and recede due to a steady reduction in size. The message seems to be that each singular disk in the progression is an individual possessing a bright interior of its own that is unique in that cannot be directly witnessed from the inward standpoint of any of the other equally unique disks (Fig. 4.9). Hence, one can interpret that painting as a representation of a community of individuals who participate in self-referential optical introspection: the looking at the interior brightness of one's own activity of seeing. Or perhaps the progression implies continuity in the existence of a particular disk of individual brightness through changing points in time. In a similar way, the circular hollow or cavity in *Paramount Cosmos* (Fig. 4.10) exhibits an inner thickness like that of a magnifying glass. The role of substantial transparency of the disk in *Paramount Cosmos* can be expressed by analogy with Arthur Danto's helpful example of looking through the medium of glass in a mediating windowpane at forms of things outdoors. The mediating glass can "disappear" and become temporarily invisible—or at least absent from notice or awareness—dur-

[2] Wu (2005, pp. 31–32).

[3] Gao Congyi, " The Dao of Ink and Dharma Objects—On Jizi's Paintings," p. 108.



Fig. 4.4 Jizi, *Snowy Great Wall,* 2003. Ink and color on paper, 124 × 248 cm



Fig. 4.5 Jizi, *Dialogue,* 2002. Ink and color on paper, 69 × 68 cm



Fig. 4.6 Jizi, *Snowy Moon from Afar,* 2003. Ink and color on paper, 69 × 69 cm

ing the perceptual experience of forms and appearances of particular phenomena outside.[4] Danto's example of the glass windowpane implies that a transformation in reverse is also possible: the three-dimensionality of the external phenomena can "disappear" as the viewer begins to take notice of the texture and immediacy of the glass. Both *Clean World* and *Paramount Cosmos* give the art observer the idea of this transformation in reverse from seeing things to renewed and intimate awareness of an intervening medium. The paintings suggest that the individual person's access to real existence is mediated by a nonobjective optical medium that has interior edges as a boundary. The paintings suggest that access to physical reality—such as mountains, planets, and skies—is through an image contained in an optical medium that includes a uniform interior area. One acquires the thought, for a moment, that Jizi represents the way in which an individual person looks upon nature through possession of an interior expanse consisting of a disklike pictorial medium that can be distinguished from the forms, patterns, and appearances that it displays (Fig. 4.11).

The geometric edges represent in some cases contours for planets at the level of the cosmos, while at other times they

[4] Danto (1981, p.151).



Fig. 4.7 Jizi, *Holy Emblems,* 2007. Ink and color on paper, 124 × 124 cm



Fig. 4.8 Jizi, *Clean World,* 2007. Ink and color on paper, 70 × 139 cm

suggest the limits of an inner optical medium at the level of the individual person. In both cases, the use of regular geometric outlines produces a challenging artistic by-product. In *Clean World,* the geometric edges of the main disk create a jarring "shock" of artificiality when compared with the textures of the mountains outside. The three-dimensionality suggested in the ridges and planetary vistas seems at odds with the interior flatness produced by the closed-contour geometric circle. In effect, traditional Chinese landscape painting is brought into dialogue with compositional problems familiar to modern Euro-American avant-garde painters who intentionally emphasize the actuality of immediate flatness to subvert the illusion of three-dimensionality constructed by Italian Renaissance techniques of perspective and modeling. Can the illusion of three-dimensional landscape space be balanced and integrated somehow with marks and lines that suggest flatness and a dimension of immediacy? The question is of high importance for Jizi because his aim is to represent unification: he seeks to unify the microlevel optical medium of the individual person with the phenomenal realm of mountains and planets, and slivers of planets are to be unified with the space of a larger universe. Unless some means for compositional harmonization can be found, there will be no satisfying way to show how the dimension of natural phenomena in human experience is related to the dimension of optical immediacy unique to the person.

This problem of compositional cohesion appears to motivate the *Dialogue with Dao Series* of 2008 that experiments with contour edges, unifying spatial reversals and figure–ground interchanges. Jizi makes single compositions that are able to shift or oscillate in appearance between a three-dimensional space containing recognizable objects and a second sort of space or depth consisting of a more general atmosphere that precedes focused discrimination of particular objects or things. One vivid experiment is evident in the *Dialogue with Dao No. 6* (2008), where he creates reversible spaces in two different respects (Fig. 4.12). First, we can notice cases of ambiguous figure perception and associated figure–ground reversals between neighboring fragments or enclosed areas. Second, there is within each separate fragment an interior shift in space between resemblance

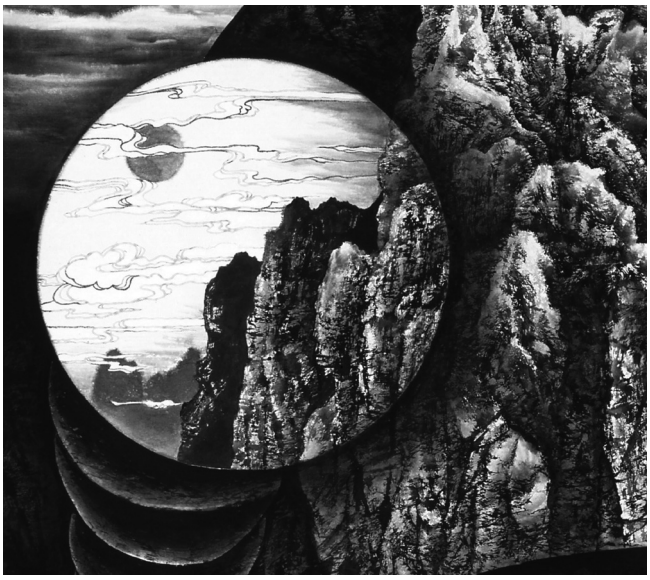


Fig. 4.9 Jizi, *Clean World,* 2007. Detail

to three-dimensional natural phenomena and the display of a nonobjective immediacy or surface flatness that seems more formless. *Dialogue with Dao No. 6* is clearly an early laboratory for experiments in paradoxical spatial effects that Yu Fan refers to when he claims that the *Dao of Ink Series* of landscapes replaces mere three-dimensional perspective with a multidimensional space that breaks through "conventional ideas for expressing near and far, high and low, up and down, left and right…."[5]

How do these two varieties of spatial interchange emerge? The spatial reversals of the first sort that emerge between neighboring fragments can be explained by examining *Dialogue with Dao No. 6* and analyzing the two darker vertical fragments sandwiched between the two lighter ones. First, there is a high-contrast edge around the vague subject matter inside each fragment (e.g., mountaintops, rivulets, clouds from high altitude, or perhaps even muscle tissue). As a result, the viewer's eye is led from interior expanse to contour edge and then to the neighboring fragments alongside that differ in degree of contrast. For example, the white fragment at center-left, sandwiched between two darker fragments, appears at first to advance forward. Yet, at other moments, it is the dark fragment to at center right, squeezed between two lighter areas, that appears to advance forward while the lighter areas seem to recede. Thus, one and the same fragment can have the appearance of two different spatial positions, depending on how it is compared with its surroundings.

The second sort of paradoxical spatial reversal works in a different way: it is entirely internal to each one of the four separate fragments. The art observer takes notice of the strong contour edge of one fragment, and this emphasis upon edges causes the three-dimensionality exhibited by the vague interior texture of the fragment to diminish. As a result, the interior within the closed-contour edge begins to shed the illusion of three-dimensional space and then advances forward as a whole that displays a nonobjective area or surface. Eventually, the details of the internal textures are noticed again, and the interior of the fragment drops back to its appearance as a conventional image of some distant three-dimensional landscape space. So, on the interior reversal of this second type, a single area alternates in appearance



Fig. 4.10 Jizi, *Paramount Cosmos,* 2007. Ink and color on paper, 248 × 124 cm

[5] Yu Fan, "Ink Paintings: Existence and Transcendence- A Review of Jizi's Art," p. 120.

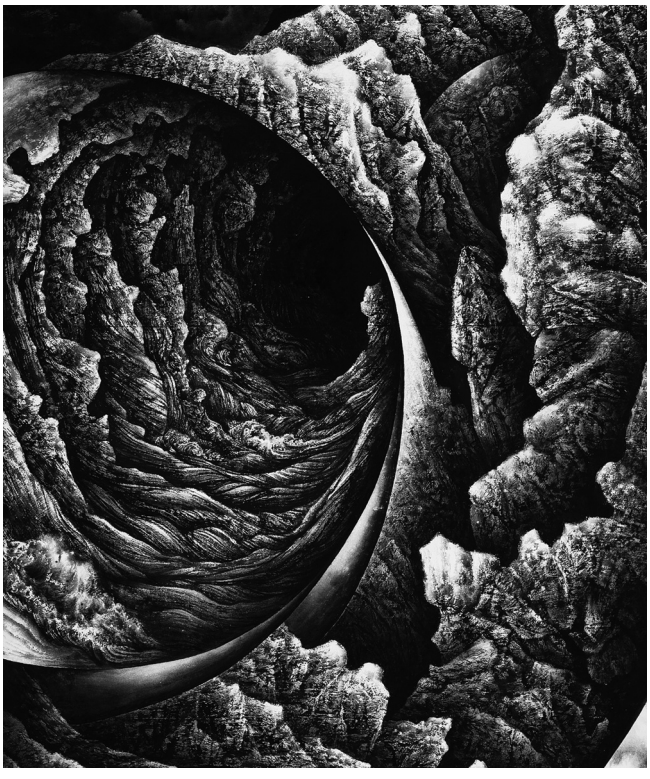


Fig. 4.11 Jizi, *Paramount Cosmos*, 2007. Detail



Fig. 4.12 Jizi, *Constructive Ink Series—Dialogue with Dao No.6,* 2008. Ink and color on paper, 150 × 96 cm

between an illusion of three-dimensional space and an area of uniform immediacy. In short, the collision between the illusion of three-dimensionality and surface immediacy is resolved: both sorts of space are accommodated in alternating moments within one and the same compositional fragment.

This new vocabulary of edges and enclosures permits movement to the breakthrough in style of the *Dao of Ink Series* of 2009. Simply put, Jizi advances by combining three ingredients: features of Chinese ink-wash painting, enclosed areas that interlock, and a quilt-like web spatial reversals. He interjects high-contrast contours into the flow of different imaginary landscapes, and then he bends the contours into enclosures that participate as sites for spatial reversals. In this way, the microlevel dimension of personal observation can be preserved in some interiors, even while other dimensions belonging to a larger universe are observed in other enclosed fragments or neighboring areas. The creative and step-by-step development within the *Dao of Ink Series* can be readily confirmed by comparing *No. 1* and *No. 2* with *No. 10* and *No. 13*. The first painting in the series, *No. 1* (Fig. 4.13), seems to combine features of the snow and ice series with several different bands or layers of landscape space. It is almost as if *Holy Light* were stacked above the textured exterior ridges in *Paramount Cosmos*. In *No. 2,* Jizi begins with landscape imagery and then inserts high-contrast edges that he developed from experiments such as *Dialogue with Dao No. 6* (Fig. 4.12). The structure provided by the high-contrast edges begins to emerge, horizons sharpen, and the figure–ground reversals begin to occur along various edges (Fig. 4.14).

Jizi's breakthrough is evident in *Dialogue with Dao No. 10* and *No. 13*. With *No. 10,* Jizi finally bends the irregular white edges to make unique enclosures of space. There is a double result: he creates unique interior areas and, at the same time, a quilt-like structure of many interiors that are interlocked and neighboring. Specifically, in *No. 10,* six distinct areas or fragments have now become enclosures separated from each other by thin white lines (Fig. 4.15). The six areas are neighboring and alongside each other, but each is also a unique internal area that is separate and not directly observable from the other five interior perspectives. Within each interior, there is an alteration of attention between the illusion of three dimensions and the flatness of the interior as a single whole. In short, the six irregular enclosures in *No. 10* are organic-looking offspring of the awkward and more lifeless optical disks in *Clean World* and *Paramount*



Fig. 4.13 Jizi, *Dao of Ink Series, No.1,* 2009. Ink and color on paper, 184 × 145 cm



Fig. 4.14 Jizi, *Dao of Ink Series, No. 2,* 2009. Ink and color on paper, 184 × 145 cm

Cosmos. The painting can be read as expressing six different optical interiors where each is united with its own interior image that is a microlevel display of natural phenomena. Jizi then transfers this structure of interlocking dimensions to *No. 13* which shows dimensions of openness upon nature and a larger universe. One enclosed area displays mountains, another some portion of sky, and a third provides a show of planetary space and a hint of deep distance. While *No. 10* represents six interiors expressive of microlevel observation, *No. 13* (Fig. 4.17) presents separate interior wholes that are filled with imagery of physical, planetary, and astronomical dimensions that extend into a space of deep distance.

One more step takes us to the paradigmatic examples of *Primeval Encounter* (2009) and *Infinite Land* (2009). Both contain at least some enclosed interiors that are emptied of perceptual appearances of things. Thus, some areas in each of these two paintings can be interpreted as pictorial representations of unique interiors of formlessness or emptiness, and this distinctive compositional emptiness will become highly important for our discussions and assessments to come. The novelty with *Primeval Encounter* (Fig. 4.18) is this: given the overall framework of the unification of self and universe (i.e., microlevel with macrolevel), there are unique enclosed interiors that have the capacity for two different displays. Some of the enclosed areas in *Primeval Encounter*



Fig. 4.15 Jizi, *Dao of Ink Series No.10,* 2009. Ink and color on paper, 124 × 124 cm

display images that resemble the dimension of phenomenal mountains or planets, while four other interiors are uniform,



Fig. 4.16 Jizi, *Dao of Ink Series No.10,* 2009. Detail

formless, and freed from the function of representing the appearances or patterns of real things. Jizi places the red ink of his seal in three of the four "purified" areas, and this associates the emptiness of interior formlessness with the intimate presence of a unique individual person. The point is that an interior expanse at the microlevel can manifest either an image of three-dimensionality or formlessness. It is precisely the juxtaposition in one painting of these two sorts of interiors that gives rise to the idea that the individual person possesses an optical medium that can alternate between the two modes: the appearance of three-dimensionality and formlessness. If the white areas of *Primeval Encounter* stood alone (e.g., as cases of nonobjective or abstract painting), there would be no shock and no sense that the radical formlessness or emptiness characterizes a personally possessed interior medium (Fig. 4.19).

It is important to mention that Jizi also creates highly original enclosed interiors that are uniform with respect to an opaque black that he calls "real black" or "dead ink."[6] This building up of a deep and opaque black through the layering of ink with a relatively dry brush can be observed in *Relics of Memory of Memory* (2007) and *Snow Clouds* (2007), paintings that Jizi made before *Primeval Encounter* (2009), and also in the formless areas of white and black belonging to *Infinite Land* of 2009 (Fig. 4.20) and the black crescent in *Heavenly Bright World* of 2011 (Fig. 6.17). Yu Fan argues that the use of opaque black "overcomes the traditional artistic formation that favors emptiness in paintings" and is more appropriate for expressing sensuous profundity and

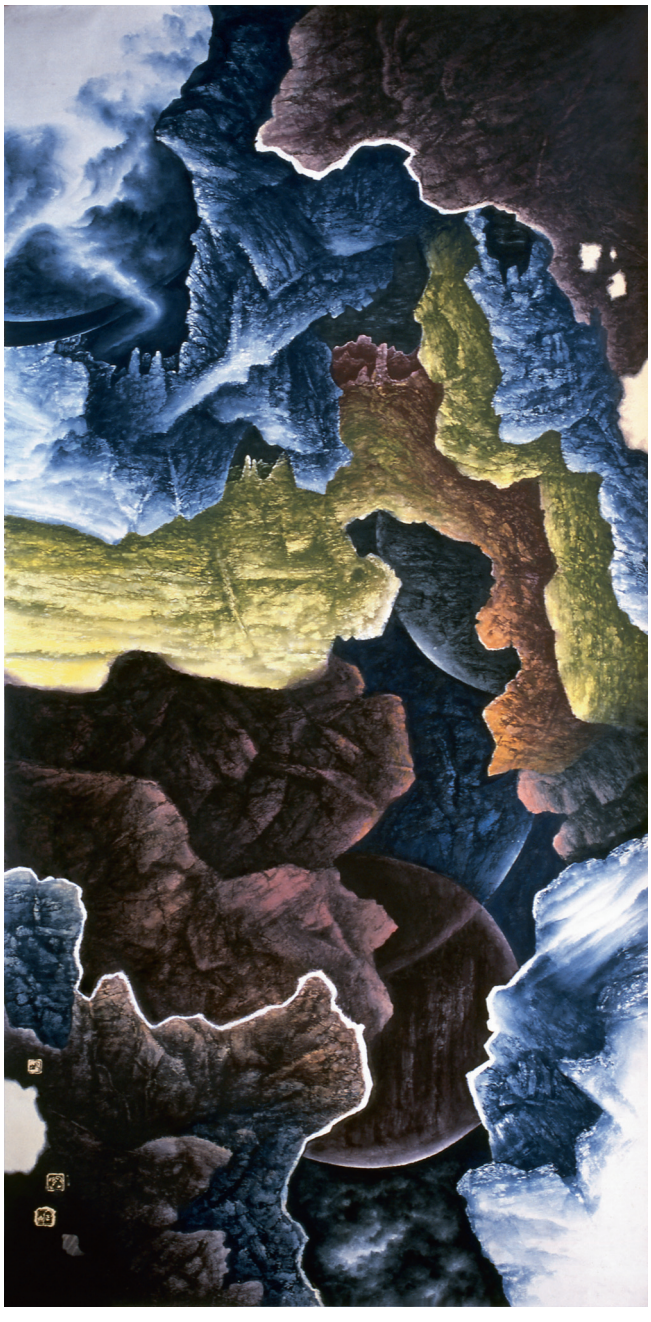


Fig. 4.17 Jizi, *Dao of Ink Series No.13,* 2009. Ink and color on paper, 248 × 124 cm

mystery.[7] The comparative merits and effects of these two ways of breaking with pictorial conventions—one with the use of white and the other with black—merit further study. In some of Jizi's paintings, the density called "real black" creates a spatial interchange and an intermittent illusion of recession into a deeper space beyond that differs from the appearing of an immediacy or presentness designated by "emp-

[6] Jizi, Reflections on Art, No. 9.

[7] Yu Fan, "Ink Paintings: Existence and Transcendence- A Review of Jizi's Art," p. 122.



Fig. 4.18 Jizi, *Primeval Encounter,* 2009. Ink on paper, 184 × 145 cm



Fig. 4.19 Jizi, *Primeval Encounter,* 2009. Detail

tiness." This may be the effect that Yu Fan refers to when he writes that the unconventional use of "dead ink" is appropriate for expressing a profound mystery. Nonetheless, it is also the case that areas of "real black" support the interpretation that Jizi's paintings continue to convey the traditional artistic subject of emptiness in unconventional and contemporary ways. Since a uniform expanse of opaque black serves equally well for expressing the sensuous texture of an immediate formlessness, Jizi's experimental use of "dead ink" in conjunction with Chinese-style landscapes of nature can be cited just as easily in support of the conclusion that his art affirms and does not abandon emptiness as a theme.

By now, the originality of Jizi's approach should be evident: his paintings are not merely representational, nor are they merely abstract. Moreover, the pictorial image of a formless *interior* whole subverts late modern Euro-American ways of interpreting abstract or nonobjective painting. Frequently, in the conventional language belonging to twentieth-century analyses of modern art, the rejection of paintings that convey the illusion of three-dimensional space is said to be a means for emphasizing instead what is sometimes described as the immediacy of the materials used in design. Some regard the disruption of pictorial realism as a means for emphasizing the immediacy and integrity of the picture plane. Others who identify the actuality of space with physical object-hood, sculptural three-dimensionality, or acts of the physical body often go on to abandon the medium of painting in favor of installations, performances, and time-arts. *Primeval Encounter* does something quite different and subverts modern European preconceptions of what painting is about. Through the novel compositional device of separate enclosures, each interior expanse can display either the illusion of three-dimensionality or else an immediate texture of formlessness belonging to an interior whole. Each ink-free enclosure in *Primeval Encounter*—left unmarked except for the vitalizing impressions in red from Jizi's seal—suggests the scale of an individual being with an interior optical medium, as is the case with the six fragments in *Dao of Ink No. 10.* With *Infinite Land* (Fig. 4.20), the fragments of interior formlessness also suggests contiguity with external dimensions of a larger universe. In this second painting, Jizi may be suggesting that formlessness is in some manner relevant to an individual person who acquires an awareness of larger dimensions of the universe.

Having achieved such results, Jizi returns to the dimension of phenomena in human experience and representational landscapes. We can attribute this return to his concern that the universe be observed as a unity of dimensions. Neither the macrolevel of the larger universe nor the microlevel of an optical medium unique to a person is more important than the dimension of human habitation and the phenomena of observable mountains or streams. Thus, he returns in an episodic manner to the theme of journeying to a spiritual homeland. For example, *The Place That Is Nearest to the Sky* (2009; Fig. 4.21) shows a monastery, high above and to the right, that clearly resembles the Potala Palace in Lhasa. While the colors of Tibetan prayer flags (Fig. 4.7) reappear, the sharp edges that now accompany reversals and interchanges of space are also present. The vertical edges between neighbor-



Fig. 4.20 Jizi, *Infinite Land,* 124 cm×248 cm, 2009

ing fragments in *Dialogue with Dao No. 6* reappear now as the horizontal and spatially ambiguous ridgelines of *Flying Snow No. 1* (Fig. 4.22).

4.2 Originators: Jia Youfu, Liu Guosong, and Xu Bing

How do Jizi's paintings compare with existing works completed by other contemporary Chinese artists who use the medium of ink? Some answers emerge when we consider the works of Jia Youfu, Liu Guosong, and Xu Bing. Together, these artists offer us a good opportunity for considering and applying Jason Kuo's categories of neo-traditionalist, synthesizer, and interrogator. Jizi's paintings are unusual, because he combines categories of style that are sometimes treated as separate in conventional art criticism; for example, he joins reconstruction of *bimo* aesthetics with abstraction, constructed cosmos, and monumental landscape. I argue below that some of his paintings share features noticeable in the ink art of interrogators, since *Primeval Encounter* conveys both an intentional illegibility that coheres with experimental uses of pseudo-characters and also a seemingly indecipherable formlessness like that displayed in ink paintings that Xu Bing calls "landscripts."

4.2.1 Jia Youfu

Jia Youfu (b. 1941) is a contemporary Chinese ink-wash painter known for his magnificent landscapes on the theme of the Taihang Mountains. In Jason Kuo's assessment, Jia Youfu is a neo-traditionalist who continues *bimo* aesthetics and creates works that can be categorized as monumental landscapes. Writing as an art critic, Zhu Liangzhi offers us an avenue for interpreting Jia Youfu's paintings. Zhu argues that the artistic notion of "instant eternity," a Chan Buddhist idea,



Fig. 4.21 Jizi, *The Place That Is Nearest to the Sky,* 180 cm×180 cm, 2009

is fundamental to Jia's paintings, such as *Penetrating the Solid Barrier* (Fig. 4.23) and *TaiHang Fantasy* (Fig. 4.24). This term, "instant eternity," does not refer to a funneling of infinite time into a measurable instant; instead, it refers to the discovery of an aspect of life that is free "from all the restrictions of knowledge, desire, and emotion—life spirit behind the chaos of this world."[8] Thus, on Zhu's reading, textured surfaces of *Penetrating the Solid Barrier* suggest how the observation of nature can bring one closer to life; one is freed from the distractions of conceptualizing and attachment to objects of temporary worth. With his own remarks on what

[8] Zhu (2012, p. 41).



Fig. 4.22 Jizi, *Flying Snow No. 1,* 2010. Ink and color on paper, 145 × 366 cm



Fig. 4.23 Jia Youfu, *Penetrating the Solid Barrier,* 1988. Ink on paper, 180 × 180 cm



Fig. 4.24 Jia Youfu, *Tai Hang the Hometown of Supernatural Beings,* 2001. Ink and color on paper, 52.5 × 69 cm

he calls the "inspiration of stones," Jia Youfu describes the way that observation of the mountain unifies him with the whole of nature. He states: "each mountain and stone of Taihang Mountain under my pencil is the result of [a] combination between mountain stone and me, as well as the fossil of my soul, which will be connected to all things."[9] Thus, real life, history, and the universe acquire significance, through observation of the immediacy and presentness of stabilizing mountains and stones. Significance is not acquired by a withdrawal from life or a departure from the terrestrial; the inspiration comes from stones that promote connection with eternity through a dialogue with immediate life.[10] This connection through the immediacy of earth is conveyed in a powerful way by *Penetrating the Solid Barrier;* textured stone and rock fill all but a tiny opening near the center of the painting. It is this immediacy of space joined with the tactility of earth and textured rock that leads to an awareness that Jia Youfu calls a sense of connection with "all things." Thus, the mountains are inseparable from inspired human visitors who wander with animals, as in *Tai Hang the Hometown of Supernatural Beings* (2001). In the monumental *Tai-Hang Fantasy* (2011), powerful ribbons of rock from a larger whole weave hollows of space that contain tiny human figures in the far distance (Fig. 4.28). The overall themes are the textures of an immediate present, human journeys through nature, and the forces of a larger universe that contains all things.

What can be said by way of comparison with Jizi? Jia Youfu calls for and expresses a profound personal connection with the immediacy of life, as well as the union of all things in nature with an encompassing infinity. This is comparable to Jizi's call for picturing the unification of dimensions of self, nature, and universe. Both work in the genre of monumental landscape; indeed, human figures walk amid mountains and journey through caverns in Jizi's *Om-ma-ni-ba-mi-hum No. 4* (2002; Fig. 4.3), just as Jia's figures do

[9] *Ibid.* (p. 41).

[10] *Ibid.* (p. 42).



Fig. 4.25 Jia Youfu, *Ode to the Bright Moon,* 2011. Ink on paper, 50 × 35 cm

in *Ode to the Bright Moon* (2011; Fig. 4.25) and *TaiHang Fantasy* (2011). Jia's Youfu's images connect each of us—as unique observers—in a most profound way with the immediacy of the vividness of actual earth, and the occasional crescent of a moon and smoldering skies are signs of a larger context. One difference is that of the order of emphasis in the display of dimensions. Jizi pictorially represents the mountainous earth and all its phenomenal textures together with dimensions of constructed cosmos. To put this another way, his imagery gives equal attention to the unseen and supersensuous dimensions of the universe with which stones in their immediacy inspire dialogue. Moreover, while both excel at conveying space as a texture of intimate presentness, Jizi does so at times by removing brushwork entirely and by including a seemingly abstract boldness of unpainted paper to emphasize a formless immediacy (Figs. 4.18 and 4.20).

4.2.2 Liu Guosong

Liu Guosong (b. 1932) has long pioneered a style that combines Chinese landscape painting with non-Chinese styles of modern art. In 1957, Liu cofounded the Fifth Moon Painting Society (*Wuyue huahui*), a group of artists in Taiwan who used the traditional medium of *bimo* (brush and ink) to create contemporary paintings of spiritual significance. During the 1960s, he experimented with the synthesis of traditional Chinese painting and modern Euro-American styles of abstract painting. His work from the 1970s combines constructed cosmos with abstraction and the optical vibrancy of pop art. Traveling exhibitions of his paintings across China in the mid-1980s contributed to the growth of what Chinese art critics have called "modern ink painting" (*xiandai shuimo*).[11] He can be described as a synthesizer who experiments with original ways of combining monumental landscape, abstraction, and constructed cosmos.

Both *Snow* (1963) and *The Universe That Is My Heart Five* (1998) display Liu Guosong's skill at synthesizing traditional Chinese ink-wash painting with the nonrepresentational brushwork of abstract expressionism. Each of these paintings uses subtle intermediate tones of ink wash to create a transition from the immediacy of ink marks to open areas of formlessness. In *Snow* (Fig. 4.28), there is a crisscrossing of elements—ink and paper—that seep slightly into each other: the presence of formlessness extends from the upper left corner to lower right, while shapes of dark ink extend from lower left to the upper right corner. In *The Universe Is My Heart Five* (Fig. 4.29), the center of attention shifts back and forth between the punctuating substantiality of the zigzagged formlessness and the blue stokes that bracket it. Therefore, Liu Guosong's synthesizing also produces effects unlike those achieved by abstract expressionists such as Franz Kline. For Kline's brushstrokes tend to emphasize their own mass and role as structures that divide and contain space. Indeed, these features of volume in Kline's work may help explain his subsequent popularity among minimalist artists who abandoned expressionism in order to emphasize material existence, the actuality of three-dimensional space, and object-hood.

With *Dharma* (1974), Liu combines ink wash and a minimum of brushwork with abstraction and a subject matter of constructed cosmos. With this depiction of the sun united with changing phases of the moon, *Dharma* (Fig. 4.30) shows his skill at synthesizing the rhythms of nature important to traditional Chinese landscape painting. Yet, the broad ink washes in blue-violet and ocher are free of traditional brushwork and belong to experiments with the lively optical vibrancy of pop art and with hard-edged abstraction. In the central panel, the sun that may perhaps obscure a hidden fifth moon is balanced by the prominence of the moons by night, while in the side panels slivers of blue moons appear within the presence of strong sunlight. Guo Xi's traditional category of "deep distance" or looking out from one mountaintop across to another is preserved in a planetary way, since all the valleys of

[11] Wu (2013, p. 20).



Fig. 4.26 Jia Youfu, *TaiHang Fantasy,* 2011. Ink and color on paper, 48.5 × 1120 cm



Fig. 4.27 Jia Youfu, TaiHang Fantasy, 2011. Detail

terrestrial life are far below. Because of the continuation of the horizon line and the earthly green across the three panels, the painting retains an overall realism of representation, and phases of nature proceed through a cosmic space that retains some subtle signs of three-dimensionality.

While Jizi faces some of the same compositional challenges as Liu Guosong, there are also some notable differences. Both artists are synthesizers who experiment by introducing geometric shapes and edges belonging to the abstractionism of modern Euro-American art. For example, the geometric edges of the circles and arcs in *Dharma* produce the same sort of flattening that occurs in *Clean World* (Fig. 4.8); in both cases, geometric lines and edges that emphasize surface planes are at odds with techniques for modeling that create illusions of three-dimensional space. *Dharma* gains power and strength from the emphasis on the immediacy of an extensive surface or area, and Liu preserves some hints of spatial recession through the subtle diagonals of green across the landscape below. By contrast, Jizi often attempts to place equal emphasis on the dimension of planetary geometry and the realm of recognizable natural phenomena such as mountains and waters. This propels him to experiment with strong contour edges that can accommodate and enclose neighboring areas where different images are often displayed within separated interiors. He seems to enclose uniform fields of emptiness to maintain the idea of microlevel cavities unique to individual persons, whereas *Dharma* uses area's uniformity in a different way to represent an extensiveness belonging to planetary space. Additional evidence that Liu often unites his compositions with an overall three-dimensionality can be found in his *Tibetan Suite 98: Snow Mountain Marks Are a Natural Network No. 98*. While this painting combines monumental landscape with inventive spatial reversals, there is a progressive lightening from bottom to top that is characteristic of modeling or aerial perspective (Fig. 4.31). This is different from Jizi's creation of distinct and neighboring dimensions, each with its own interior image. In general, Jizi seems to combine contrasting dimensions and genres, while Liu seems more inclined to explore monumental landscape in one painting and constructed cosmos in another. Jizi mixes monumental landscape with constructed cosmos in *Screams* (Fig. 4.32), *Zenith Winds* (2009), and *Heavenly Bright World* (2011).

4.2.3 Xu Bing

The third comparison here is between Jizi and the contemporary interrogator Xu Bing (b. 1955) who investigates the cultural value of the medium of ink in wood-block printing, calligraphy, and landscape painting. His experimental styles of intentional illegibility or anti-writing range from installations of pseudo-texts to ironic Chinese-style landscapes that display scenery shaped out of Chinese characters. How are contemporary artworks expressive of anti-writing and intentional intelligibility relevant to our immediate inquiry here about the capacity of traditional Chinese landscape painting to qualify as contemporary Chinese art? The curator Wu Hung reveals two ways to express the relevance when he tells us that the term "anti-writing" has two meanings in Chinese cultural history. It can refer to practices of suppression by authorities who seek to maintain tight control on writing; for example, Qin Shi Huang (260–210 BCE) ordered the banning and burning of unapproved texts after expanding the state of Qin. Considered more positively, anti-writing is the intentional debasing of a script from its identity as a text that refers to intelligible things in order to emphasize instead signifiers of aesthetic or purely calligraphic value. Traditionally, this is accomplished by brushwork that is so swift or threadlike that the resulting marks have no mean-



Fig. 4.28 Liu Guosong, *Snow,* 1963. Ink and color on paper, 89 × 59 cm

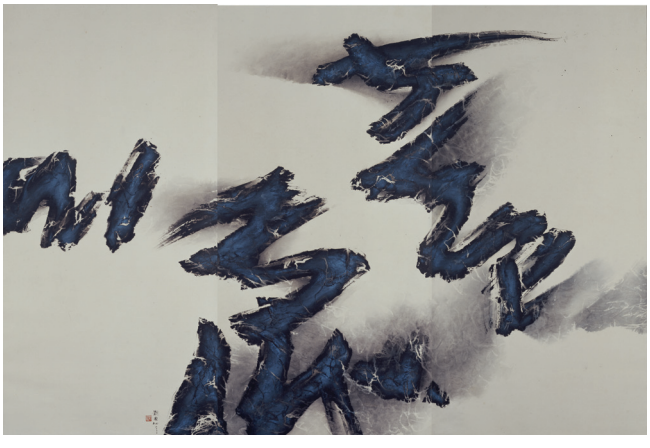


Fig. 4.29 Liu Guosong, *The Universe That Is My Heart Five* (1998. Ink and color on paper, 186 × 337 cm

ing within the Chinese language system. Wu adds that some contemporary Chinese artists, including Xu Bing, take a radical step by intentionally crafting fake or purely calligraphic signifiers that are entirely non-notational as Chinese characters.[12] By considering Xu Bing's work here, I propose to create a reference class for the second interpretation of anti-writing that may then be used comparatively to assess the full range of compositional features displayed by Jizi's paintings. To prepare for a comparison with Jizi's work, it is useful to analyze Xu Bing's *Book from the Sky* (*Tianshu*) (Fig. 2.2) and the playful ironies suggested by his ink painting *Landscript* (2001; Fig. 4.34).

Xu Bing's installation entitled *Book from the Sky* consists of invented characters printed on 120 hand-printed books, walls hangings, and sheets of paper suspended overhead. Each individual book is a set of folded and stitched sheets with a fake text printed from hand-carved pear woodblocks bearing an impersonal typeface inspired by Ming and Song dynasty models of printing (Fig. 4.33).[13] Applying the first definition for anti-writing, curator Maxwell Hearn regards Xu Bing's experiences of both the national program to simplify Chinese and of changing texts during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) as influences leading to the creation of *Book from the Sky.* For Hearn, this artwork implies both that China's literary classics and history have become less accessible and also that even contemporary pronouncements and characters posted as news can become incomprehensible when compared with actual practice. This first interpretation fits Xu Bing's original title: *Mirror to Analyze the World: The Century's Final Volume*. Yet, Hearn himself adds in the same paragraphs that Xu Bing's final title, *Tianshu,* is more ambiguous: it can refer to a heaven-sent book about what is precious but indecipherable by human intellect, just as easily as it can signify "emperor" and "writing," or proclamations by authorities that obscure truths.[14]

Given this ambiguity, there is equal reason to consider *Book from the Sky* according to the second interpretation for the term "anti-writing." Support for this move comes from Wu Hung who states that interrogators, including Xu Bing, Gu Wenda, Wu Shanzhuang, and others, go even further than ancient calligraphers in intentionally removing intelligible content and creating artistic signifiers of purely aesthetic value. Since he states that this same group of contemporary Chinese artists is "best known for its familiarity with traditional arts and aesthetics," Wu concludes that emergence of anti-writing, fake texts, and nonsense characters "appears as a rebellion within traditional Chinese art" and not as an avant-garde of modernism that is antagonistic to Chinese tradition.[15] The intriguing implication is that *Book from the Sky* and other recent cases of anti-writing that lack conventional literary meanings may be an effective present-day

[12] Wu (2005, pp. 36–39).

[13] Hearn (2013, p. 44).

[14] Hearn (2013, p. 43, 45).

[15] Wu (2005, pp. 38–39).



Fig. 4.30 Liu Guosong, *Dharma,* 1974. Ink and color on paper, 60 × 154 cm

way to uphold or reveal basic and enduring principles within Chinese culture, philosophy, and aesthetics. *How* or in what way the jettisoning signifiers of intellectual understanding works as skillful means for upholding Chinese culture becomes a live issue. The question then is how a viewer is to ascribe meaning to Xu Bing's installation when it is composed of pseudo-texts that are intentionally designed to hinder communication of any cognitive understanding of things. Euro-American art critics and philosophers of art who favor cognitive theories of art and literary interpretation will have an especially difficult time exploring the second definition of "anti-writing" and fully explaining the contemporary significance of *Book from the Sky*.

Xu Bing's *Landscript* (2001; Fig. 4.34) is especially relevant to our inquiry because it relates the second definition of anti-writing to the tradition of Chinese-style landscapes. In this painting, Xu Bing explores anti-writing in the second sense by placing some handwritten characters that are intelligible and notational within the Chinese language in relationship to a natural vista that contains a formless pictorial field resistant to any reading as a comprehensible object. Although the painting appears at first to be a conventional Chinese-style landscape in brush and ink, close inspection reveals that the scenery of recognizable objects and configurations—a hillside with house, vegetable garden, and trees—is often constructed from relevant Chinese characters. For example, the pictographic Chinese character 門 (*mén*), or "door" in English, is placed at the door to the thatched-roof cottage; 窗 (*chuāng*) is matched appropriately with spots for windows or portals; and 菜 (*cài*), which carries the same meaning as "vegetables," is repeated to make rows in the garden to the left. As a result, the painting is a pictorial symbol that expresses the traditional aphorism, often repeated by Chinese painters and critics, that "character writing and painting have the same origin" (*shuhua-tongyuan*), as well as the theory-laden idea of late modern semiotics that artworks and natural vistas are to be analyzed as "texts."[16] As Sue Wang points out, the playful ironies that result can also be perplexing: "the concrete and the abstract begin to overlap" while characters that aid an understanding of things put at a distance the very same vista that they denote.[17] By approaching *Landscript* with the expectation that anti-writing in the second sense can reveal a signifier of aesthetic value that is unintelligible as a sign for any conceptualized object, the art observer can move beyond perplexity and notice that the same painting that depicts a vista of nature and linguistic signifiers for intelligible things is also an image about meandering pockets of a diffuse pictorial space that is formless. The diffuse emptiness—especially evident in its circulation around the door to this home without walls—is an observable context that welcomes the brushstrokes that place pictographic characters, such as 門 and 窗, in recognizable configurations. The image of formless space is evident, even when Xu Bing supplies no matching character that signifies it as an intelligible thing. The painting invites the thought that both painting and calligraphy are connected with a pictorial expanse evident to a human eyewitness of nature that can be identified by none of the linguistic signifiers that refer to cognitively distinct and well-understood objects or events. The painting initiates a question of interest: How does an image of emptiness *between* brushstrokes that create notational characters enable *Landscript* to express Chinese traditions of painting, aesthetics, and philosophy for the benefit of people today? What meaning is a viewer supposed to ascribe to the image of spatial formlessness that is by intention left empty of definite objective referents?

[16] For a valuable discussion of the origins of this aphorism, see Gao (2012, p. 68).

[17] Wang (2013).

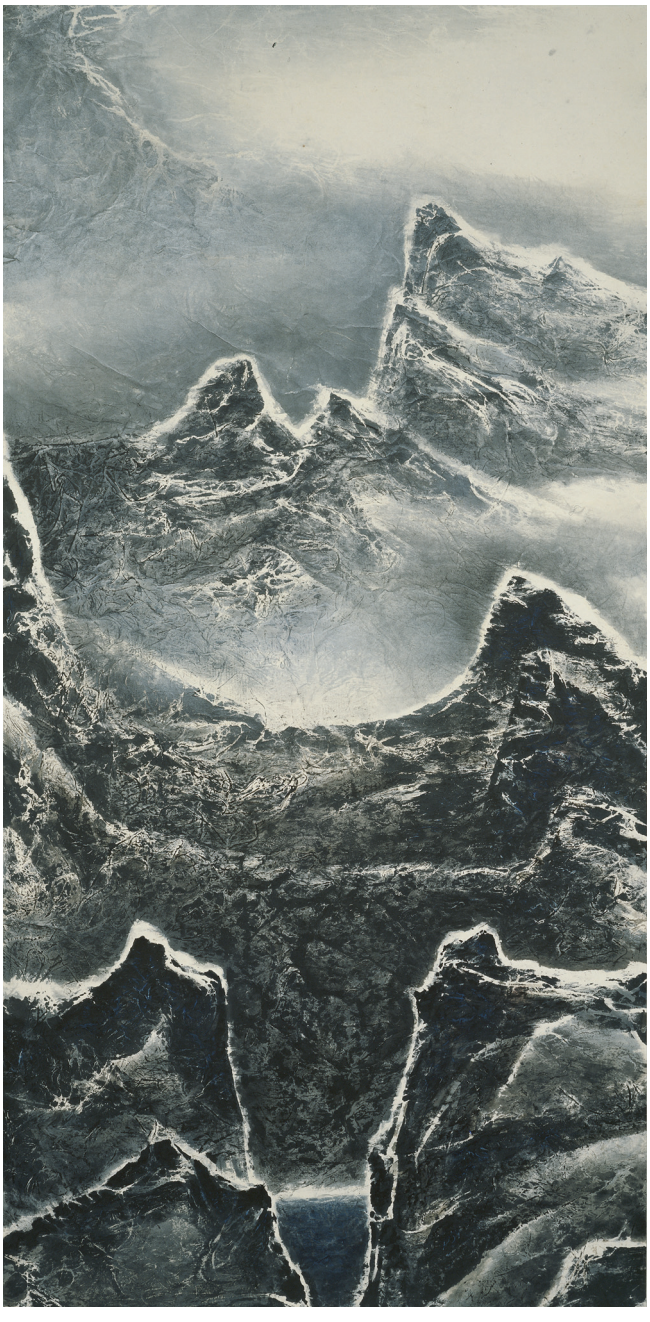


Fig. 4.31 Liu Guosong, *Tibet Suite 98: Snow Mountain Marks Are a Natural Network,* 1998. Ink on paper, 102 × 232 cm, 1998

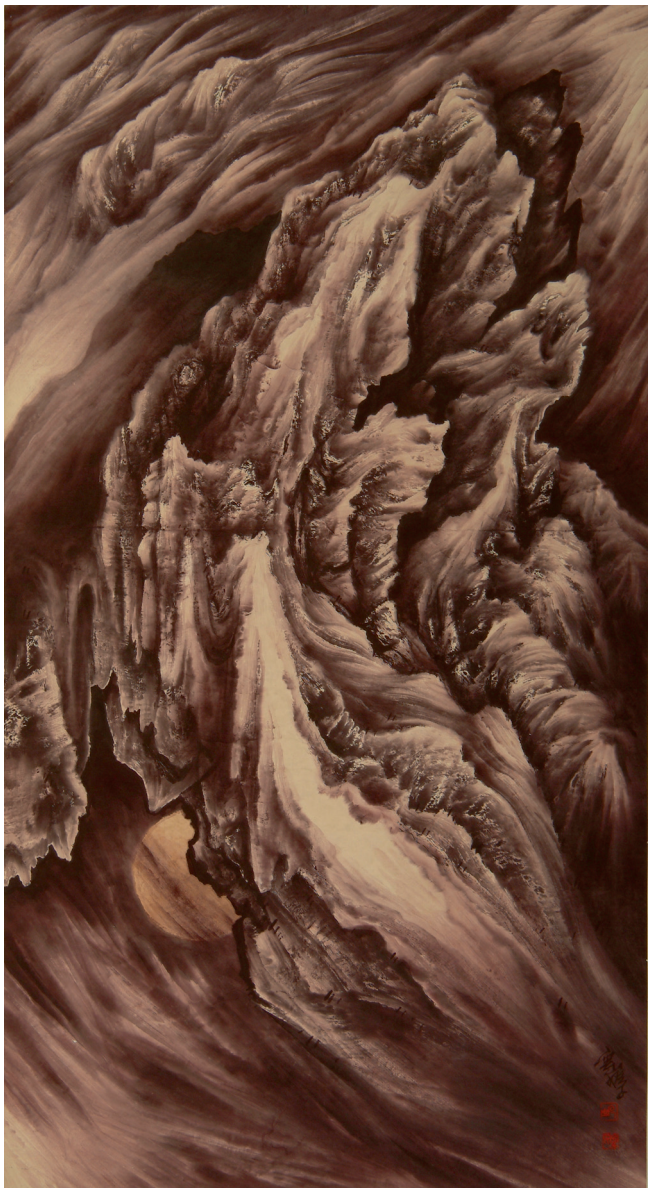


Fig. 4.32 Jizi, *Screams,* 1998. Ink and color on paper, 151 × 82 cm

More clarification is needed if art critics are to appreciate *Landscript* as a meditation on the relation between language, experiences of things, and a pictorial aspect of nature that is unreadable as a text referring to clearly conceived objects or properties. Zhu Liangzhi's remarks on Jia Youfu's paintings are suggestive in this regard, since Zhu refers to an immediacy of life that is present and free from restrictions imposed by knowledge. But it is hard for modern-minded art critics or philosophers of art to explain how a given signifier still refers to actual life when it is freed from all those meanings that refer to cognizable things that any one of us understands and knows. Thus, contemporary art critics and museum curators who seek to evaluate *Landscript* and Xu Bing's purpose in using intentional illegibility do face a predicament. Words are needed to announce the rebellion within the tradition of Chinese art against restrictions that equate literary signification with references to comprehensible things. But late modern art critics and scholars often restrict themselves to the use of discourses that describe human experiences of noticeable forms, patterns, things, or processes. In one sense, it may be this cultural restriction of art criticism and theory to the language for empirical events—or to terms for empirically known things and processes—that sparks rebellion now within the tradition of Chinese art and motivates Chinese artists to experiment creatively with illegibility.

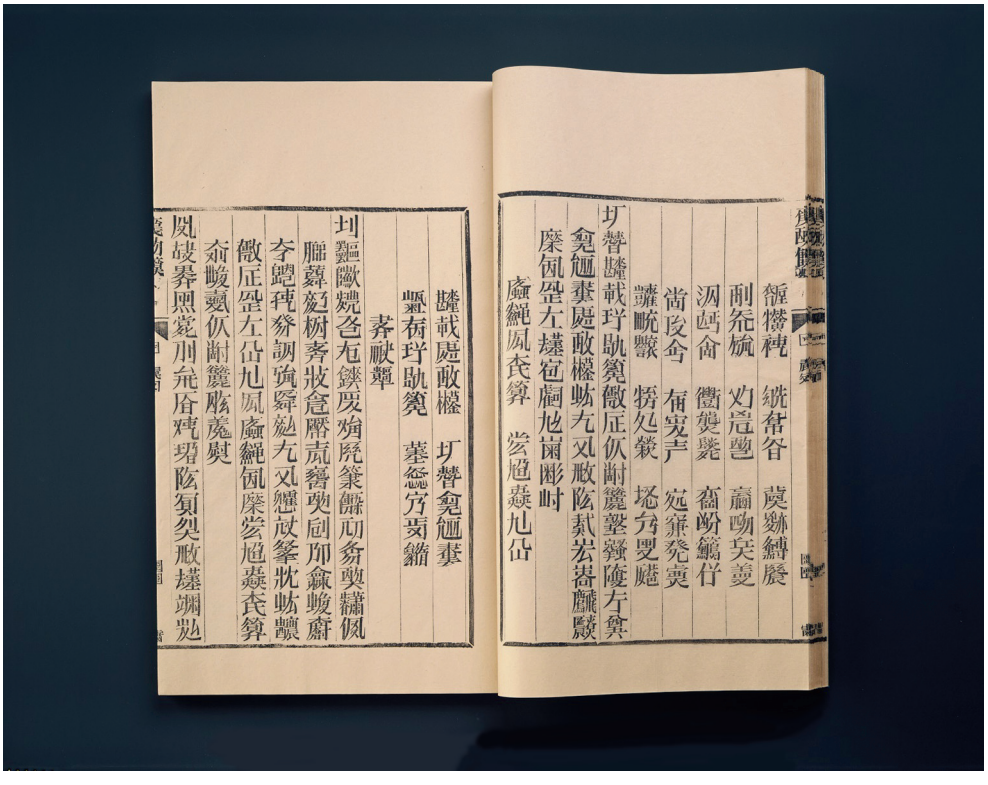


Fig. 4.33 Xu Bing. *Book from the Sky,* 1987–91. Woodblock-printed volume, open 46 × 51 cm

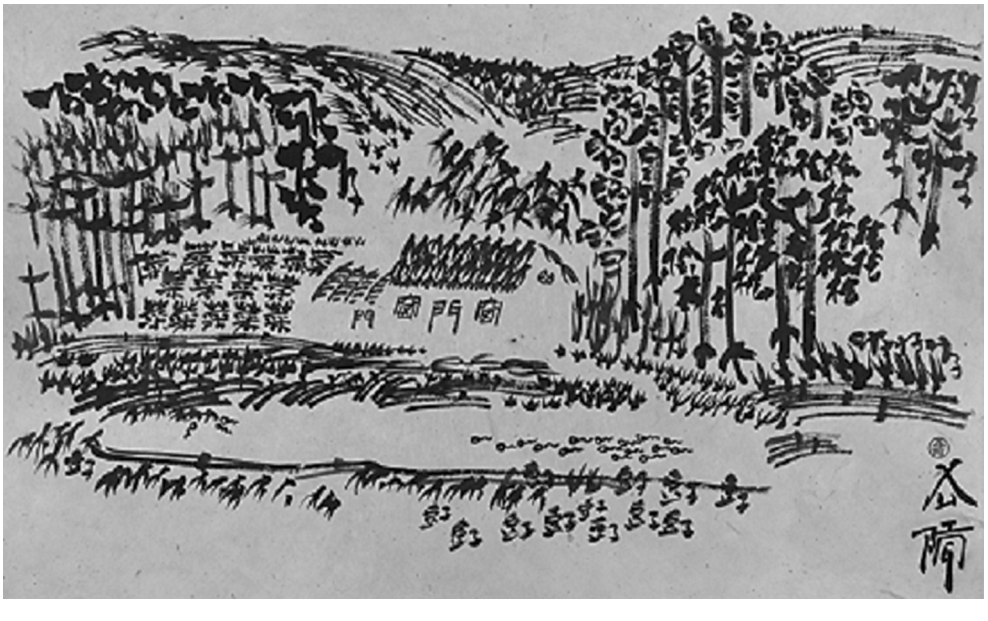


Fig. 4.34 Xu Bing, *Landscript,* 2001. Ink on paper, 48.9 × 74.5 cm

How does this discussion about contemporary Chinese anti-writing and Xu Bing contribute to the project of clarifying the style of Jizi's compositions? The example of *Primeval Encounter* (Fig. 4.18) shows that Jizi creates images for the purpose of emphasizing a formless expanse that is emptied of all forms or signifiers that attract conceptual thinking about comprehensible things. The impressions in ink from the artist's own seal make it plain that the open areas of formlessness in *Primeval Encounter* are intentional. It can be argued then that Jizi practices a version of radical anti-writing of the second kind with some of his paintings, because he removes all brushwork and leaves a *constitutive emptiness* or formlessness of white paper that is cleared of *all* symbols that customarily refer to understandable things, including all signifiers of visually experienced forms. Wu Hung notes that Xu Bing's art of intentional illegibility is

associated with a group of artists interested in upholding indigenous Chinese traditions of culture. Since it is Jizi's stated aim to express aspects of traditional Chinese philosophy through his paintings, his work does cohere with that of contemporary interrogators who experiment intentionally with styles of illegibility in order to explore the values and aesthetic principles that Chinese culture offers people of the present. It is clear that Jizi's art contributes to the shared task of investigating and clarifying the relationship between illegibility and meaningful symbolizations of immediate life, even if the link between emptiness in Jizi's paintings and the picturing of the principle of self in union with nature and others is not yet explained.

Finally, then, what conclusions can we extract from the comparisons between Jizi and Jia Youfu, Liu Guosong, and Xu Bing? Neo-traditionalists may uphold traditional aesthetic principles of Chinese ink art by continuing the practice of painting monumental landscapes. The artistic synthesizer can sometimes combines *bimo* (brush and ink) aesthetics with abstraction, depictions of planetary space, or both. Interrogators often investigate the medium of ink and paper by means of experiments with illegibility and formlessness. Jizi's case is unusual in that such categories are scrambled all together in his work: he uses traditional Chinese aesthetics to create a wider synthesis that includes reconstruction of the aesthetics of *bimo,* monumental landscape, constructed cosmos, abstraction, and anti-writing that interrogates the relevance of the traditional medium of Chinese ink art. The three comparisons here confirm the uniqueness of his style: he combines purposeful collage-like gatherings of multiple dimensions with pictorial representations of terrestrial phenomena, planetary space, and displays of interior formlessness. Conventional Euro-American avant-garde definitions of nonobjective art are surpassed or subverted because some of Jizi's paintings differentiate observable formlessness as belonging to a dimension of interiority.

We are left with this question: Is there an interpretation within Chinese aesthetics that can be used to explain how Jizi's unusual compositions—including those that utilize anti-writing to emphasize a formless pictorial expanse—succeed in representing a unifying contact of self with nature and universe? Having arrived at a vocabulary for Jizi's imagery, our need is for some reliable principle of aesthetics that will enable us to evaluate whether his compositions succeed in showing the unity of such dimensions as emptiness, human steps in icy snow mountains, and vistas of the cosmos. To proceed, it is necessary to find some principles of aesthetics that will clarify the value of images that display an intentional illegibility. Instead of relying on Euro-American aesthetic roots, it is prudent to act on Liu Yudi's suggestion that tools of Chinese aesthetics are necessary to arrive at a viable interpretation of what practices of ink art indigenous to China are about. One path forward is to develop a contemporary interpretation for the Chinese aesthetics of authentic landscape painting that Jing Hao expressed during the Five Dynasties period. By developing an interpretation of Jing Hao's aesthetic standard for images that are authentic representations of the liveliness of nature, we may notice a suitable way to differentiate some contemporary Chinese artworks as authentically Chinese. As we shall see, by creating images with areas that are formless or "empty," Jizi pictorially represents one root of an individual person's awareness of fusion with observable nature.



Philosophy of Chinese Ink Art

5

We require an interpretation for principles of Chinese aesthetics that will help us describe how contemporary Chinese artists can express images that are authentically Chinese. In particular, we require an interpretation for Chinese aesthetics that will help us assess whether Jizi's compositions represent the unification of subject with object and observable nature with dimensions of a larger universe. Where shall we begin? Jizi states that his compositions are influenced in part by the the paintings and writings of Jing Hao (c. 855–c. 915) and Shitao (1642–1707). Jing Hao is recognized both as a painter (Fig. 5.1) and as a writer who brought guiding principles of Chinese aesthetics to landscape painting in a way that aided the emergence of the unsurpassed landscapes of the Northern Song (960–1127) and Southern Song dynasties (1127–1279). So, it is reasonable to inspect the aesthetics of Jing Hao's *Bi fa ji* (*Notes on Brushwork*) for any principles that might be interpreted in a way that strengthens contemporary Chinese aesthetics. The text expresses six principles: vital energy, resonance, thought, scene, brush, and ink.[1] It is the first two principles—vitality or spirit (*qi* 氣) and rhythm or resonance (*yun* 韻)—that are of immediate interest; for they lead us to a discussion of what the painter must do to create a true or authentic (*zhen* 眞) representation of nature. The aim then is to interpret the principle of the authentic image in traditional Chinese aesthetics so that contemporary Chinese artists have guidance today in making images or installations that are alive and resonant with the vitality of nature. The live hypothesis here is that the description in *Bi fa ji* of the authentic image of nature may provide a present-day standard for assessing whether a work of contemporary Chinese art is authentically Chinese.

Jing Hao's text on aesthetics is a manual for crafting an image that will be authentic, alive, and resonant with the liveliness of nature. The job of interpreting the text is difficult, because the authenticity of an image is defined apart from resemblances between the image and forms, shapes, objects, or patterns experienced in nature. Thus, it is hard to state what in actual practice the painter is instructed to do with ink and paper so that the result is an authentic image. The philosopher Li Zehou expresses the difficulty with respect to *qi*: "It is not purely material, since it is a type of vital force; nor is it purely spiritual, since it has an intimate connection with the material."[2] The term *yun* can be puzzling as well. Some regard *qiyun* as a feature of personal moral development and "a purely spiritual element in painting without any actual presentation;" yet others claim that "a painting could have *qiyun* through brushwork."[3] As we shall soon discuss, the image that represents nature authentically is one that manifests "spirit" (*qi* 氣) passing through what is called "substance" (*zhi* 質). The question of the meaning of *zhi* and what sort of substantial element it denotes cannot be avoided. The frequent use of the term "substance" for the translation of *zhi* suggests that the authentic image is a result of passing spirit through some durable ground or foundational medium that supports changing experiences of physical things and events.

One way forward is to analyze scholarly commentaries on passages in *Bi fa ji* about authentic images and root sources within which spirit may inhere. This chapter surveys a chain of such commentaries by the following scholars: Li Zehou, Roger Ames and David Hall, Stanley Murashige, and Stephen Owen augmented by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. First, according to Li Zehou's reading of *Bi fa ji*, spirit and rhythm have manifestations in nature and are represented in images through technique. Li also interprets spirit in relation to a ground or context that he describes as "noumenal sensuosity," a term that by his stipulation refers to the sensuous existence of the individual person and not to a Kantian "thing in itself" beyond the realm of a person's senses.[4] In their interpretation of creativity in *Zhongyong*, Ames and Hall assert

[1] Jing Hao (2000, p. 205).

[2] Zehou (1994, p. 63).

[3] Gao (2012, pp. 208–210).

[4] Zehou (2010, p. 85).

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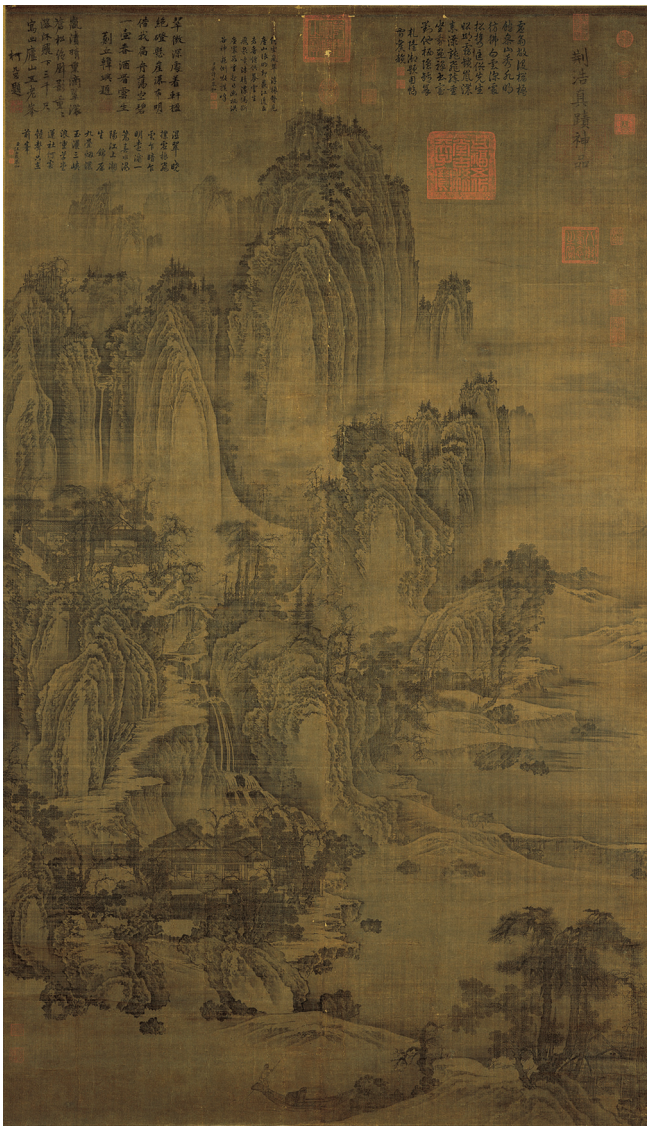


Fig. 5.1 Jing Hao, *Mount Kuanglu*, c. 900. Ink on paper, 185.9 × 106.8 cm

that the individual person's *qi* inheres within the flux and flow of the field of phenomenal objects and events in human experience. As we shall soon discuss, Murashige's remarks about *Bi fa ji* and the making of authentic images develop a similar interpretation that connects *qi* more specifically with its accompanying substance *zhi*. However, there is a limitation to any description that refers to *qi* inhering within a field composed of natural phenomena in human experience; the description does not enable us to differentiate authentic images from those that represent phenomenal objects and events in human experience. In his interpretation of *Bi fa ji,* Stephen Owen takes us in the right direction. In his reading, the authentic image is one that emphasizes a "sensuous norm" that is "deeper" than experiences of forms, shapes, objects, or appearances. But Owen does not fully explain how the inherence of *qi* within the elemental sensuous norm deeper than experiences of things produces an awareness within the individual person of the unification or fusion of self with nature. The connection between self and a "deeper" or more stable sensuous norm inseparable from nature is expressed by adding Merleau-Ponty's term "the visible." He uses this term to denote a general atmosphere that joins nature with the individual person's own corporeality. We can use "the visible" experimentally to interpret the substantive and extensive ground that *zhi* provides for spirit. In this way, we arrive at a provisional interpretation for the authentic image. The relation of "rhythmic vitality" (*qiyun*) may be described as a resonance between an authentic image containing a hollow of the visible and the animating field of the visible that is the root of the individual person's own sensuous existence within nature. Ultimately, the relevance of the traditional notion of the authentic image for contemporary China seems to depend on finding some accessible language for the interpretation of the substantive field denoted by *zhi*.

Through a series of dedicated steps, we arrive at the following conclusion: It is possible to create an experimental interpretation for the principle of the authentic image in traditional Chinese aesthetics and thus for *qiyun*. Hence, this interpretation may be used today as a standard for assessing whether Jizi's compositions depict self in unification with the liveliness of nature. The conclusion is that exploration of traditional Chinese aesthetics offers contemporary Chinese artists at least one practical criterion—intentional manifestation of *zhi* or the substantial field that includes the atmosphere of the visible—for assessing whether an artwork is an authentic expression of the individual person's sensuous union with nature. Thus, Chinese artists can weigh and consider this experimental interpretation for authentic imagery when they seek to make artworks that are authentically Chinese for audiences across the world.

5.1 Jing Hao and Authentic Images

Bi fa ji (*Notes on Brushwork*) contains a dialogue between two imaginary figures: the painter poet from the valley and the painter of Stone Drum Cliff who offers instruction. The text starts with the young painter's ascent from the valley into the Taihang Mountains. Through mossy trails and rocks wrapped in mist, the painter finally enters a portal of cliffs and finds a place filled with pines. After living with the pines for some days, the painter completes 1000 drawings to make just one that he believes to be authentic. Returning the following spring, he meets the older painter who offers advice on six principles of painting: vital energy or force, harmony or resonance, thought, scene, brush, and ink. What does the sage say about the first two principles, *qi* and *yun*? The young painter poet from the valley offers the hypothesis that

the creation of verisimilitude or mere likeness with respect to form is sufficient for making an authentic representation of nature. However, the older man disagrees and describes the difference between an image that merely resembles patterns or forms of things in nature and an image that is alive and an authentic representation that resonates with the vitality of nature. The veteran painter discusses the necessary technique for creating a live and authentic image:

> The codger said, "It is not so. Painting is to etch lines. One sizes up the image of the thing and from that seizes upon what is authentic in it. If it is the visible pattern of a thing—seize its visible pattern; if it is the essential substance of the thing—seize its essential substance. One cannot seize on visible pattern and make it essential substance. If one does not know this technique one can perhaps squeeze out a likeness, but the representation of authenticity can never be attained." I said, "What do you take to be the likeness? What do you take to be authenticity?" The codger said, "Likeness gets to shape, but drops out the vital energy. Authenticity is when vital energy and essence are both abundant. As a general rule, if vital energy is passed only through external pattern and is dropped out of the image, then the image dies."[5]

Some features of the older painter's thinking begin to emerge, despite the challenges of translation. In Stephen West's interpretation here, the authenticity (*zhen* 眞) of the image (*xiang* 象) stems from the abundance there of both vital energy (*qi* 氣) and essence (*zhi* 質). West uses "essence" for *zhi* and amends this to "physical essence (*zhi*)" in his commentary as if to signal that the referent is corporeal and observable and not merely spiritual or mental.[6] Martin Powers and Li Zehou use the term "substance" for *zhi,* a move that presupposes less and even leaves open some possibility that the referent might be observable and not perceived as a material property or event.[7] By stipulating that hereafter the term "substance" be used for occurrences of *zhi*, we can regard the point of the lesson as this: the painter cannot grasp the substance of a thing—or that which sustains that thing and everything else observed—by mere inspection of the appearances or forms of that thing. Hence, the making of an authentic image requires noticing first the presence of the substantial field that supports all personal observations of visual phenomena and then depicting a semblance of this field in a painting. It is the presence of some icon or example of this field designated by the term "substance" that differentiates an authentic image from lifeless images that merely exhibit a resemblance with respect to form or patterns of physical things. While the referent of the term "substance" (*zhi*) is still an open question, it is clear from the quote above that the painter needs to attend to the substance in question (e.g., some whole that persists through the coming-to-be and passing away of visual perceptions of physical properties or forms) in order to create images that are authentic and true to the vitality nature. If the painter is not aware of the practical *technique* of painting for doing this, then an authentic image of nature cannot be made. Thus, the passage suggests the following process of creation for an authentic image: the painter observes the image of a thing in nature, seizes the substantial field that supports that thing, and then uses ink wash to create an image that passes spirit through a display of this supporting field and not just through the forms and shapes that resemble objects in nature. The result is a painted image that is authentic and alive, because it shows objects as existing or inhering within an observable and animating field, just as objects appear in nature to the human eyewitness.

All this leads to several implications of interest. First, the painter must combine spirit and substance during the process of making in order for the resulting image to qualify as a representation that is authentic. Neither expression of spirit nor the realism of "scientific modeling" is enough. Second, when spirit is combined with the field that is called "substance" to create an authentic image, this is done formlessly by emphasizing the field (*zhi*) throughout the whole image, not by imposing concepts that structure the perception of more forms, shapes, and patterns. Third, a painting with rhythmic vitality expresses the relationship between a living authentic image with a liveliness of nature displayed directly to an observer. In short, there is a practical way to use brush and ink to create an authentic image: The painter applies spirit and emphasizes substance enough so that the image is alive and is a representation of the actuality of nature.

What does the painter need to do, in order to make an authentic image that resonates with nature? As Gao Jianping notes, one answer is "brushwork" or "sparse and simple brushstrokes;" indeed, the absence of these is often cited, as a reason for declaring many European paintings lifeless despite their strong likeness to three-dimensional volumes through the techniques of chiaroscuro or linear perspective.[8] Yet, this is not quit sufficient to clarify the technique for making authentic images, in Jing Hao's sense. We need to explain how the sparseness of brushstrokes is relevant to increasing the awareness of the sustaining ground that Jing Hao implies by using the term "substance." What is this supporting substance that is noticeable on its own independently of the perception of form and pattern? We need an account of what the term "substance" is about and what the painter actually brings out by means of brushwork so that the painting begins to exhibit a liveliness like that displayed by the actuality of nature.

The remainder of this chapter develops an experimental interpretation for the authentic image by analyzing scholarly

[5] Jing Hao, "*Bi fa ji* (Notes on the Method for the Brush)", p. 204.

[6] Stephen H. West, "*Bi fa ji* (Notes on the Method for the Brush)," p. 204.

[7] Powers (2000, p. 235) and Li (1994, p. 187).

[8] Gao Jianping, *The Expressive Act in Chinese Art*, pp. 288, 292.

interpretations for *qi* and the substantial field *zhi* in which spirit inheres. With an account of the authentic image, we can begin to take up the more difficult question of how images of the vitality of nature express the individual person's unique unification and fusion with mountains or bamboo. This more difficult question is addressed in the exploratory comparison of the terms *zhi* and "the visible." Eventually, we arrive at a criterion for assessing whether Jizi makes images that represent the individual person's own evidence for unification or fusion of self with observable nature and ultimately with a larger universe.

5.2 *Qi* and Sensuous Noumenon

Li Zehou's writings are a good starting point for a present-day interpretation of the aesthetic principle of *qiyun* and the principle of authenticity on which it depends. In *The Path of Beauty* (1981), Li describes *Bi fa ji* and the way in which landscape paintings exhibit a rhythmic vitality (*qiyun*) that represents the manifest liveliness that an individual person *observes* in nature.[9] In *The Chinese Aesthetic Tradition* (1989), he discusses *qi* at length, within the context of "the mutual complementarity of Confucianism and Daoism."[10] At times, he describes the individual person's *qi* in terms of an inner condensation of a morality that is *a priori* or independent of sense experience, and he describes the human pleasure that arises from unity with nature as a "noumenal attitude."[11] At first glance, it might seem that these two texts are in opposition: one suggests that spirit and the feeling of oneness with nature are connected with what is manifest through the senses, while the other links them to the noumenal. *If* Li were using "noumenon" in a Kantian sense, then it would seem to follow that the painter's own spirit (*qi*) and the joy of union with nature would have no original manifestations in sensuous existence that would be available for pictorial representation. However, as we shall see, Li Zehou does not use "noumenon" in Kant's sense. Thus, we may continue to take Li Zehou's interpretation of Jing Hao's aesthetic of *qiyun* as a firm starting point. Moreover, Li Zehou's frequent and intriguing references to each person's "individual sensuous existence" suggest that we may consider defining the term "substance" (*zhi*) by reference to an utterly unique embodiment with which the authentic image resonates.[12]

As Li Zehou notes, the principle denoted by the term "rhythmic vitality" (*qiyun*) has become, since the Five Dynasties period, the general criteria for assessing whether a traditional Chinese landscape painting expresses what is precious in Chinese cultural heritage. He gives a compact commentary on the passage in *Bi fa Ji* that defines those images that are authentic (*zhen*):

> [Jing Hao] described the relationship and difference between "resemblance" and "true representation" as follows: "Resemblance is capturing the physical aspects of an object, but neglecting its spirit. A true representation possesses both spirit and substance" (*Notes on Brushwork*). In other words, resemblance is not true representation, because the latter must reveal the inner spirit, quality, and charm of the subject…. Artists must not be content with reproducing only the external form of an object, or just achieving formal resemblance; they must try to capture its spirit and inner quality. This required that the scene or object be observed, grasped, and depicted in a realistic yet generalized way.[13]

In this extended passage, Li follows Jing Hao carefully: one and the same image can *both* resemble the form of a physical object *and* be alive and authentic. But he makes it clear that resemblance to the forms or patterns of real things is not sufficient to guarantee that an image will qualify as authentic and alive. Li Zehou makes three points of interest above. First, he claims that the artist must *observe* an object in nature in order to have a grasp that is sufficient for creating an image that is authentic. To rephrase this more directly, Li suggests that *qi* is indirectly manifested in observations of nature. Second, Li Zehou describes what the artist must grasp, observe, and reproduce to make the image in ink an authentic one. He suggests that the artist must grasp the "spirit and inner quality," which is not the same as perceiving physical forms. Third, Li defines the authenticity of an image by three features: "the generality" of the image, which avoids precise detail; the infusion of the artist's feelings; and the freedom of imagination left to the viewer, for whom the image "might almost be said to resemble a hallucination."[14] Although the passage quoted indicates Li's choice of "substance" for the translation of *zhi*, Li explains authenticity in terms of the artist's feelings and audience imagination, not by reference to a supporting field. Yet, Li connects vitality with the "generality" of the image, and this suggests that any line used to create shape, pattern, and subject matter must enable the human viewer to notice how open areas of paper have a role in the passing of spirit though substance. Li's use of the word "hallucination" to describe the infusion of the painter's feelings into the image is of interest; for it suggests that the feeling of vitality comes from looking at an image that is manifested to the individual viewer as a singular and private substantial field (*zhi*).

The same passage above includes Li Zehou's claim that the "scene or object be observed" in order to grasp its vitality or "inner spirit." This is sufficient to establish Li's

[9] Zehou (1994, pp. 185, 186).

[10] Zehou (2010, pp. 76–116).

[11] *Ibid.* (pp. 64, 84).

[12] *Ibid.* (p. 244).

[13] Zehou (1994, pp. 185, 186).

[14] *Ibid.* (p. 186).

commitment to the following: there is first an *eyewitnessing* of a manifestation of the vitality of nature consisting of *qi* expressed with some observable object. Then, the painter goes on to create an image that is authentic and resonant, after having observed the initial liveliness of the natural landscape. Li Zehou treats Jing Hao as the initiator of the aesthetic ideal continued in the remarks of Guo Xi a century later: it is not the realism of the scene but the artistic effect that the scene is *available to be lived in*—in Guo Xi's words, "as if one were actually in the mountains"—that marks a painting as authentic and an expression of the principle of rhythmic vitality. While Guo Xi connects *qiyun* here with an image of scenery, his remarks are consistent with Jing Hao's claim that *qiyun* is achieved by authentic images that exhibit *zhi* (substance); for the painter still needs to pass *qi* through *zhi* to ensure that an image resembling scenery or a mountain peak remains alive. Li adds his own insightful description: "In other words, the circumstances, ideals, charm, and atmosphere of life as a whole should be expressed in the painting."[15] So, to summarize, our first conclusion is this: it is by looking at nature that the painter is aware of a spirit manifested in an object and of actually living in union with mountains.[16] The painted image expresses the "inner spirit" of an object in nature authentically when it resonates with the way the landscape is observed and witnessed by the eye of the individual person who is actually within nature.

All this is promising, since it implies that the painter of *Stone Drum Cliff* is offering advice for crafting an observable image that is an authentic representation of direct and observable contact with nature. It is not clear yet how ink should be distributed with paper in order to represent "the atmosphere of life as a whole." Nor is it clear yet how grasping the "atmosphere of life as a whole" is also grasping the supporting substantial field (*zhi*) that must also be depicted to ensure that a painted image is authentic and alive. Nonetheless, Li Zehou offers a contemporary interpretation for traditional Chinese aesthetics that links authentic images of the liveliness of nature and to resonance with the individual painter's direct witnessing of nature.

It is the use of the technical term "noumenon" that may tempt a reader to incorrectly regard Li Zehou's account of *Bi fa ji* as conflicting with his more philosophical analysis of the unity of Confucianism and Daoism. Consider first the way Kant defines the term *noumenon* as "a thing which is not to be thought of as object of the senses but as a thing in itself."[17] Reason may speculate about something as existing in itself; but no human observer can know about or have evidence for what is beyond the senses and observation. For Kant, the noumenal is not within sensuous existence. What do we find in *The Chinese Aesthetic Tradition*? We do find that the term "noumenon" is used to describe the individual person's own *qi*. First, consider *Mencius* (2A2), the Confucian text that refers to the "flood-like *qi*." In Li Zehou's interpretation of this passage, the source of *qi* and inner moral force is a "rational noumenon."[18] The following line by Li Zehou about *Zhuangzi* 4.10.1 might also lead some readers to jump to the conclusion that the senses must be denied in order to arrive at ultimate heavenly joy at oneness with the universe: "…one must eliminate the mind and the senses, in order to nurture and forge a pure consciousness that is united with the way ('The Way gathers only in emptiness')."[19] In addition, Li Zehou does write that Zhuangzi's union or oneness with the whole of nature is "a kind of transcendent noumenal attitude."[20]

However, Li Zehou states very explicitly that he does not use "noumenon" in the Kantian sense. When he uses "noumenon" within the nondualistic context of Chinese philosophy, it has a different meaning. He stipulates that the word "noumenon" is to be translated by *benti* (本體), a term that denotes the basic existence of all things. Thus, he claims to avoid the division that Kant makes between the world of phenomena in human experience and the noumenal world of things in themselves that are beyond human observation. Li goes on to explain this point:

> We translate *noumenon* as *benti*, a word coined from *ben* (root origin) and *ti* (stem, body). *Bentilun* literally means a discussion, theory, study, or view of *benti*, and this compound was adopted to translate ontology in Chinese. So, instead of a study of being, *bentilun* is a study of the *benti* (root, origin) and *ti* (stem, body) of things. Clearly, this approach views the origins of things from a more biological and historical perspective than from that of metaphysics. I suggest that the root and body of human practice is *benti* and, further, that human emotions (subjects) and tools (objects) are *benti.* I like to call *bentilum,* the study of *benti*, or historical ontology, and emphasize that *bentilum* is the study of the root and body of things.[21]

Li Zehou uses *noumenal* to refer to human practical activities and processes of creation that that are revealed through historical study. The root and stem of humanity and human existence include the instrumental processes of toolmaking that result in forms of social existence such as psychological constructions of cognition, moral will, and aesthetic enjoyment.[22] Therefore, as Marthe Chandler argues compellingly, Li Zehou's remarks about *benti* quoted above from *Four Essays in Aesthetics* make it plain that he cannot be interpreted simply as using "noumenon" in the Kantian sense.[23]

[15] *Ibid.* (p. 187).

[16] *Ibid.* (p. 186).

[17] Kant (1929, p. 271).

[18] Li (2010, pp. 62, 63, 84).

[19] *Ibid.* (p. 81).

[20] *Ibid.* (p. 84).

[21] Zehou and Cauvel (2006, p. 40).

[22] *Ibid.* (p. 40).

[23] Chandler (2012, pp. 147–150).

Li Zehou's clarification that he interprets *noumenon* in terms of *benti* is especially interesting, because it appears that there may be two phases of interpretation—two voices—for describing *benti* (本體) or the root and body for singular human practice. On the one hand, in his analysis of the "individual self of flesh and blood," Li asserts that the root of things and "the significance, singularity and richness of the individual being are products of human history;" and on the other hand, he also states that "the individual existence as a flesh and blood being will be, along with the development of the material civilization, more and more aware of its own singularity and uniqueness."[24] Thus, the singularity of the individual painter's artistic practice has a bodily origin that is known as a material effect (i.e., known scientifically). Yet, there is a suggestion here that "flesh and blood" implies also a bodily origin that enables the individual to witness its own singular uniqueness. It may be argued that these two interpretations are not equivalent in meaning, whether or not Li intends the difference. The first manner of interpretation seems to cohere with the empirical standard, such as being known as a sensuous object for a third party.[25] By contrast, a corporeality that is utterly singular and unique to the individual will not be a sensuous object for a third party who observes the person. Thus, by design or not, Li's text gives us the idea that there is a second and more intimate mode of interpretation for self-sentient embodiment in nature. This second mode is available to us as we seek to develop new interpretations for classic texts of traditional Chinese aesthetics.

5.3 *Qi* and Field of Experiences

Roger Ames and David Hall interpret *qi* (spirit) in relation to a sustaining field of natural phenomena in a way that helps us clarify the role of *zhi* (substance) in an authentic image. They articulate the notion of *qi* in relation to a "field of processes and events" consisting of "no final elements, only shifting 'foci' in a phenomenal field."[26] They argue persuasively that the *qi* of the individual person is indirectly manifested through an *observable* field that is inseparable from the context in which a person experiences phenomena in nature. It is Stanley Murashige who uses this relation between *qi* and field of phenomena to interpret *Bi fa ji* and the passage that defines the authentic image as one that combines *qi* (spirit) and *zhi* (substance). However, these three authors rely on the language of human experience of phenomenal things to describe the extensiveness or field within which *qi* is supposed to be embedded. So they provide no description of how the authentic image exhibits a substantial field (*zhi*) that is independent of resemblance to phenomenal events or things in human experience.

While Ames and Hall do not emphasize paintings and landscapes in their analysis of the *Zhongyong,* what they say about the observable field within which the individual person's *qi* is embedded is very relevant to our investigation. For their discussion is an opportunity to find language that can explain what the painter does in passing *qi* (spirit) through *zhi* (substance) to make an authentic image. To justify this notion that *qi* is in relation to a field of phenomena, they note that "flood-like qi" is described in *Mencius* 2A2 as "this *qi* as that which is 'most vast' (*zhida)* and 'most firm' (*zhigang*)."[27] They take this to mean that "flood-like qi" has "extensive" and "intensive" aspects: "This language of extensive field and intensive focus suggests that one nourishes one's *qi* most successfully by making of oneself the most integral focus of the most extensive field of *qi*."[28] Citing the line from *Mencius* (7A4)—"Everything is here in me"—they assert that there is an observable and extensive field associated with *qi*; however, the field is "here in me" only because an "intensive 'me'" brings a particular focus to the extensive field.[29] Thus, the useful point here is this: an *observable extensive field* is present and available for *qi* as a moral force in Confucianism as well as for the joy at oneness with nature described in Daoist texts. Appling their results, we can say that the painter's own internal vital energy (*qi*) is inseparable from an observable field that belongs to the external display of natural phenomena.

Ames and Hall divide the internal focus of *qi* from its external field of application. One question is this: Could the extensive phenomenal field belong to some unique enclosed interiority of the individual person? Ames and Hall resist the belief that *qi* is embedded in an extensive field that is innate; they hold that the extensive field belonging to *qi* is in the external realm of ordinary observable phenomena. Although Mencius states that "everything is here in me" (7A4), they take this to mean that an extensive field remains outside and becomes constitutive of me only after I focus my perceptual thinking upon it. Their resistance to the inference that the extensive field belongs "here in me" as a radical interior is evident again when they analyze *Zhongyong I* and the statement that one needs "to be ever concerned about one's uniqueness" (*shen qi du*) in order to be an exemplary person. They claim that the attentiveness to uniqueness mentioned in *Zhongyong I* "must not be read as a concession to anything like a radical subjectivity." As a result, they analyze the individual person's moral self-creation in a purely empirical way or in terms of habits of behavior observable to a third party.[30]

[24] Li and Cauvel (2006, p. 42).

[25] Marx (1988, p. 154).

[26] Ames and Hall (2011, p. 7).

[27] *Ibid.* (p. 24).

[28] *Ibid.* (p. 24).

[29] *Ibid.* (p. 25).

[30] *Ibid.* (pp. 45–47, 89). By using the term "subjectivity," they seem to be warning us away from the old-fashioned idea of a radically interior

Can we use the account that Ames and Hall give to develop the interpretation we seek for an authentic image? Ames and Hall try to distance their account from preconceptions that trouble classic European philosophies. However, it can be argued that their account has a limitation: the particular idea of process that they attribute to Chinese philosophy has an origin in American pragmatism and William James. For James, observable nature is defined by a flux and flow of experiences; he denies that there is any bedding or a more basic context that persists as an element that supports the flux and flow of experiences.[31] Like James, Ames and Hall define the continuous field supportive of spirit in terms of human experiences of material events and things. Like James, they describe the field that sustains experiences as itself composed of discrete experiences—as "*foci* within a continuous field of changing processes and events."[32] They also define "self" by referring to "the flux of experience" available to the individual person: "Self actualization is a focal process that draws upon an aggregate field of human experience."[33] On their account, there is no additional element inseparable from nature that underlies the flux of experiences; self-creation stems entirely from experiences of things. Therefore, if we recall that the authentic image is created by passing spirit through substance, and if we take the interpretation of "extensive field" developed by Ames and Hall and substitute it for the term "substance" (*zhi)*, then an authentic image would be one that merely passes spirit through patterns and events in human experience. But this is the definition of representational images that display resemblance with objects of experience. This does not explain how an image remains alive precisely because it exhibits some elemental field that is not experienced in the form of objects of perceptual experience. When all talk of a "bedding" for the flow of experiences is denied, there is no possibility of a more radical interpretation for "substance" suitable for a twenty-first century Chinese aesthetics. Ames and Hall themselves grant that the "continuous flux and flow" sometimes defies predication and is more than the things that we know. However, it seems that they do not explore the remainder that they themselves describe as defying formation into experiences.[34]

Stanley Murashige's interpretation of *Bi fa Ji* contains similar strengths and a similar gap. In Murashige's account, the "inner reality" or substance that must be grasped to make an authentic image is "both its *qi* and its phenomenal substance, *zhi*."[35] Thus, Murashige helps us establish a most valuable and fundamental premise: *zhi* (substance) *is inseparable from observable displays of natural phenomena and therefore directly witnessed.* Since he holds that "*qi* is inseparable from phenomena," he infers that "*qiyun* obtains a phenomenal manifestation."[36] In other words, since spirit cannot be separated from the substantial field that accompanies displays of natural phenomena, Murashige concludes that spirit (*qi*) shows through in manifest objects that are observable and candidates for pictorial representation. Murashige continues: "In nature, *qiyun* is the consonance of response—of statement and rejoinder—that plays itself out among the myriad relations constituting the material world."[37] He uses the language of experience, phenomenal things, and material conditions when describing the extensive field that can be represented pictorially. However, once again, there is a gap if we use Murashige's discussion to infer that *zhi* is identical to the experiences of material events that it supports. There would be no clear difference between the realistic image that achieves verisimilitude to phenomenal things and the authentic image that is alive and resonant with nature because it is not experienced as a form, pattern, or phenomenal event.

To summarize, Ames, Hall, and Murashige help by interpreting *qi* (spirit) in relation to an observable field. This in turn provides an account for interpreting *zhi* (substance) as an observable field of the vitality of nature that can be represented artistically. But they do not seem to advance beyond the claim that the extensive field of *qi* is the aggregate of all experiences of phenomenal things in mutual relation. Part of Jing Hao is left unexplored when they stop with the result that the substantial field (*zhi*) associated with *qi* consists of nothing other than definite events, shapes, patterns, and material events in human experience (i.e., 10,000 things in relation). The venerable painter in *Bi fa ji* warns the young visitor against such a move: "One cannot seize on visible pattern and make it essential substance." The painter-sage is interested in an observable ground that is not one of the "10,000 things." The authentic image is alive, because it expresses a field that is not experienced as a particular thing.

Where does this leave us? We seek a new interpretation for the image that is authentic, so that we can assess Jizi's paintings for their authenticity. So far, given the help from Ames and Hall, and Murashige, it seems that the authentic image, in Jing Hao's sense, contains *qi* in relation to an observable expanse that is coextensive with visual experiences of natural phenomena. However, to preserve Jing Hao's notion of an authentic image, we must interpret this special extensive field of substance (*zhi*) without referring to forms, patterns, or recognizable events in human experience. So, the next step is to consider contemporary interpretations, on which the authentic image displays an observable context or

ego; but this raises the question of whether "uniqueness" may be defined by some other radically interior element of self-existence that is more suitable.

[31] James (1996, p. 26).

[32] Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Focusing the Familiar*, p. 10.

[33] *Ibid.* (pp. 22, 32).

[34] Ames and Hall (2003, p. 97).

[35] See Stanley Murashige (2003, "Philosophy of Art," p. 515).

[36] *Ibid.* (pp. 515–516).

[37] *Ibid.* (p. 513).

sensuous field that is more basic than appearances of things that are available to human experience.

5.4 *Xiang* and *Zhi*: Image, Constitutive Emptiness, and the Visible

To uphold an interpretation of an image that is authentic and alive, we need to describe some manifest field that is not experienced as an object or material event. Fortunately, in Steven Owen's scholarly interpretation of *Bi fa ji*, the authentic image is defined as a combination of *qi* and a sensuous element that is at a basic level "deeper" than the cognitive level of experiences of forms, shapes, things, or events. In this avenue of interpretation, the painter of Stone Drum Cliff is showing the young visitor techniques for creating authentic images that display a more fundamental semblance to the vitality of nature than that of resemblance to physical forms and patterns. *Bi fa ji* begins with an account of verisimilitude to appearances, because Jing Hao's primary aim is to emphasize, by contrast, that an image can represent nature authentically in a second and more profound way.

Owen describes what an image (*xiang* 象) must contain in order to function in this second and more fundamental way: "In the context of the technical terms that surround it, this *xiang* is 'appearance' in a deeper sense than *si*, a mode of 'appearance' that leads the deliberative painter to grasp the 'substance' (fruit, *shi*), as well as the 'flower' (*hua*)."[38] Although Owen does connect this deeper mode of appearing explicitly to *zhi*, he claims that *qi* guarantees authenticity. Yet his reference to a deeper mode of appearing does suggest a supporting whole or optically present sensuous expanse. Continuing, Owen claims that the pedagogical purpose of the original Chinese text is to encourage readers to notice a sensuous context that differs from perceptual experience of particular forms or appearances. In his opinion, the text is a device for intentionally "devaluing the immediacy of the percept in favor of the reflective discovery of sensuous norm within the percept."[39] Owen makes the important claim here that the authentic image emphasizes a "sensuous norm" that is always copresent with visual experience but never itself a form, object, or thing in human experience. He implies that a painting is more true to the actuality of nature when it contains an image that conveys a "deeper" sensuous element that is *not experienced as an object* and impossible to depict by resemblance to form or physical features. Owen's contribution is that he articulates *qi* (spirit) in relation to an elemental context of sensuous existence that is more basic than visual experiences of particular things. His wording hints at a norm for a substance of sensuous surfaces that goes unmentioned in the interpretation that Ames and Hall offer. Nor is the idea of a sensuous element integrated as yet back within Murashige's account of *qi* and *zhi* (substance).

The difference between the image that resembles external things and the image that is authentic is clarified in Owen's approach: "here we have a bad outside (*hua*) and a good outside (*xiang*); what differentiates them is the immanence of *qi*…."[40] He seems correct here, as long as we add that the "immanence of *qi*" that qualifies an image as authentic is the result of the passage of *qi* through some substance (*zhi*) that is displayed in the painted image. The presence of spirit and an inner feeling of the spirit of an object are necessary; but the painter must also notice and depict the substantial field in order to create an image that is authentic, according to Jing Hao's standard. The painter of Stone Drum Cliff is very clear: The painter must notice the substance of an observable thing and not just its forms; for only then can substance be represented in an image and an authentic representation of the vitality and actuality of a thing in nature be achieved. The painter creates an authentic image, only after passing *qi* through substance—or through some extensive sensuous element that gives integrity to the image considered as a whole. Therefore, Owen helps us progress another step, since we can now define the authentic image as one in which spirit passes through an observable extensiveness that is a sensuous norm more basic and "deeper" than cognitive experiences of forms, shapes, and physical events.

However, Owen's account does not yet provide an aesthetics that enables us to assess contemporary Chinese artworks for their authenticity. What we still lack is a contemporary interpretation that explains how the authentic image produces in the human onlooker an effect of oneness or unification with living nature. *We need to create a new interpretation that can explain how the authentic image that is true to nature is also an image of the unification of the individual person with nature*. Again, our motive for interpreting Jing Hao's aesthetics is to develop a new principle for assessing Jizi's claim that his paintings show the unification of self with nature and the universe. The references to unification in traditional Chinese aesthetics are many: Guo Xi suggests something of a kinship with mountains: "Looking at a painting, one feels as if one were actually in the mountains."[41] Shitao's writings suggest a stronger notion of inseparability of the painter and mountains: "They are in me and I am in them."[42] How does the authentic image made by brushwork on paper convey to the painter a union or fusion with the liveliness of nature? Our overall aim is to develop an interpretation for this notion of union, so that we can determine whether a given artwork is an authentically Chinese contri-

[38] Owen (2000, p. 214).

[39] *Ibid.* (p. 218).

[40] *Ibid.* (p. 215).

[41] Zehou (1994, p. 187).

[42] Coleman (1978, pp. 75, 126).

bution to global art. Thus, there is one more step or link to explain. We need a more fine-grained description of *zhi* (substance) as a sensuous norm so that we can explain how the authentic image gives the individual person an awareness of an utterly unique and personal union with nature.

What resources of philosophy can help us with this task? We can progress by bringing Stephen Owen's account of a sensuous image (*xiang)* that functions authentically alongside Maurice Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of "the visible." The convergence is sufficient for the creation of an experimental interpretation for the authentic image. Owen claims that "xiang" displays authenticity by exhibiting some "sensuous norm" that is at a level deeper than visual perception; similarly, Merleau-Ponty reports that his eye wanders through a more general texture and "atmospheric existence" of the visible within which he perceives an individual color as a brief crystallization or "tuft."[43] Merleau-Ponty refers to the porous and metallic shimmering of the visible as an "element" that mingles but never merges with perceptual experiences of things and with thinking.[44] He also refers to the visible as "a constitutive emptiness" and a "lake of non-being."[45] In other words, when one notices the field of the visible without regard to the particular shapes appearing within it, then it can be called a medium and a hollow of "emptiness" offered by the field of one's own eye. This exploration of Merleau-Ponty and the idea of interiority seems promising, given Li Zehou's intriguing claim that individual sensuous existence is utterly unique.

For Merleau-Ponty, the whole of the visible is an atmosphere or continuous field that can be noticed for its own sake. It is a medium or thickness that "disappears" from awareness, when attention shifts to the visual perception of objects and events of material interest.[46] Again, Arthur Danto's analogy to a pane of glass is helpful: one can focus on the surface texture of clear glass in a windowpane, or one can watch the "disappearance" of this surface, as one notices instead the particular kinds of forms, shapes, and colors that pass through it from outside.[47] Moreover, the visible whole that one observes is a "little private world" or *idios kosmos* that differs from the common world or *koinos kosmos* that we share.[48] This is to say that the field of the visible is evident only to the singular individual who possesses it. Most importantly, while the visible is a thickness that reveals the world, it is also constitutive for the seer of the seer's own corporeality: "I who see have my own depth also, being backed up by the same visible which I see."[49] The thickness of the visible is constitutive of one's own utterly unique corporeality unseen by others, and it is the medium by which one's own body reveals one's own elemental union and acquaintance with the world. The visible is a tissue that sustains things and it is subject to two different phases of interpretation: it is the display of the world and "the whole of the sensible;" and it is an element that constitutes the seer who no longer knows the difference between seer and the seen.[50] It can be argued that the enclosed disk of the visible in *Clean World* (Figs. 4.8 and 4.9) and the thickness of the transparent disk in *Paramount Cosmos* (Figs. 4.10 and 4.11) are pictorial images of the unique interior whole of the visible through which one observes objects and patterns for oneself.

Merleau-Ponty's philosophy explains how witnessing one's own utterly unique sample of the visible as a secret interior dimension can lead to an awareness of a larger universe outside. To put this in Jizi's terms, the microlevel of the individual person has a means of developing an awareness of a macrolevel dimension. Given that the dimension of the visible is an element of the individual person's own utter uniqueness, it serves as a stepping-stone for thoughts about what is presumably an outside of invisible being. Merleau-Ponty says the following; "Every visual something, as individual as it is, functions also as a dimension, because it is given as the result of the dehiscence of Being (*déhiscence de l'*Être*)*. What this ultimately means is that the hallmark of the visible is to have a lining of invisibility in the strict sense, which it makes present as a certain absence."[51] In other words, after one observes the visible in the second phase of interpretation as a sample of one's own private world, enclosure, or envelope, then one is likely to infer that there are other unseen dimensions that belong to an "outside." By using the term "dehiscence," Merleau-Ponty preserves the notion that the visible is an inner sensuous element that bursts forth as the deeper "fruit" of actual existence that is not expressed in third-party empirical knowledge. Thus, "whole of the visible" refers to a dimension of the individual person's interiority that is neither thinking nor a physical object. Merleau-Ponty's account of the visible at the microlevel of the individual in relation to invisible being coheres with Jizi's description of unification: "The harmonious unification of subject and object is just the unity of humanity and Heaven."[52]

By combining Owen and Merleau-Ponty, we acquire an experimental vocabulary for interpreting the traditional Chinese aesthetic principle of the authentic image. We arrive at a compelling description of the authentic image and the

[43] Merleau-Ponty (1968, pp. 131, 132).

[44] *Ibid.* (pp. 10, 131–132, 139).

[45] Merleau-Ponty (1993, p. 144).

[46] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 138.

[47] Arthur Danto, Transfiguration of the Commonplace, p. 56.

[48] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Visible and the Invisible, pp. 10–11.

[49] *Ibid.* (p. 135).

[50] *Ibid.* (pp. 136–138).

[51] Merleau-Ponty (1993, p. 147).

[52] See Jizi, Reflections on Art, No. 45.

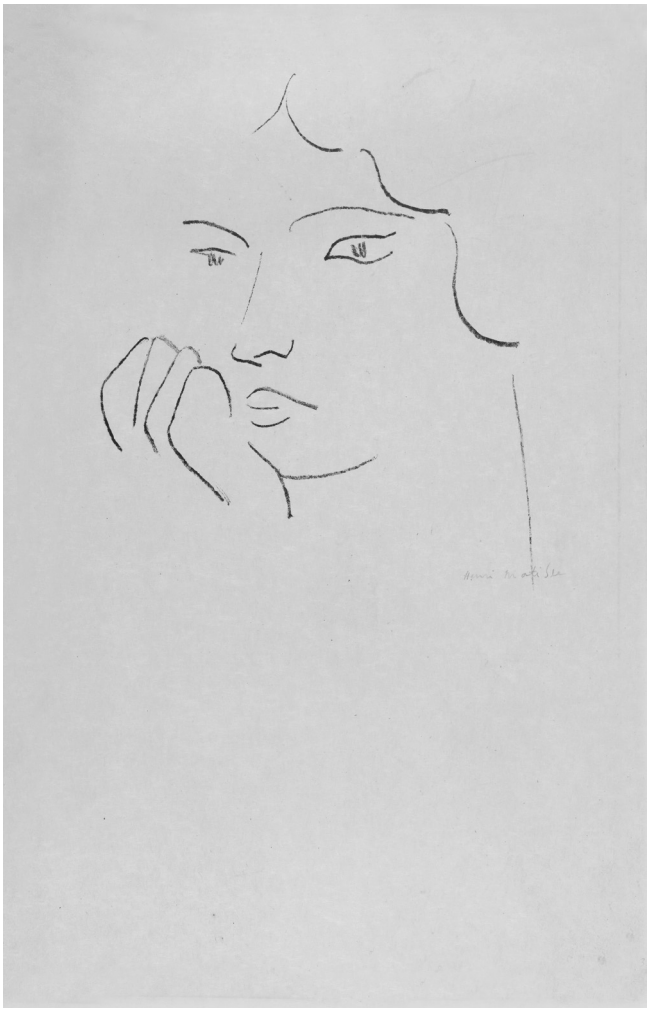


Fig. 5.2 Henri Matisse, *Pensive Woman*, c. 1915. Lithograph, 44 × 27.5 cm



Fig. 5.3 Paul Cézanne, *Mont Sainte-Victoire*, 1905–1906. Watercolor on paper, 36.2 × 54.9 cm

passage of vital spirit (*qi*) through substance (*zhi*). It is much easier to think of the passage of spirit through substance as a description for authentic representation of the liveliness of nature, when we take this to mean that the painter creates an image of the sensuous norm of the visible that animates the individual person's own unique openness upon nature. Thus, we can supply a plausible meaning for the term "substance" (*zhi*) in the definition of the authentic image without departing from the realm of individual sensuous existence.

The foregoing account of the sensuous element of the visible does have practical value for art criticism of paintings and drawings. Merleau-Ponty shows that his notion of the visible helps to explain paintings, so an interpretation of the term "substance" in terms of the thickness of the visible may help us explain the contemporaneousness of Jizi's paintings. The painter-sage in *Bi fa ji* would probably approve of Merleau-Ponty's remarks on the way Henri Matisse uses line and paper to create not only shapes but also a substantive and yet nonobjective hollow of the visible: "the line is no longer a thing or an imitation of a thing. It is a certain disequilibrium contrived within the indifference of the white paper; it is a certain hollow opened up within the in-itself, a certain constitutive emptiness…" (*un certain vide constituent*). This hollow of the visible may be found in examples such as Matisse's *Pensive Woman* (Fig. 5.2).[53] Merleau-Ponty goes on to interpret Paul Cézanne's compositions, by applying the notion of the visible as a hollow of space that is prior to height, width and measured depth. He says: "*The Portrait of Vallier* sets white spaces between the colors which take on the function of giving shape to, or setting off, *a being more general* than yellow-being or green-being or blue-being."[54] He makes the same claim about Cézanne's late watercolors, of which *Mont Sante-Victoire* is a typical example (Fig. 5.3) For Merleau-Ponty, Cézanne's late watercolors challenge the notion that objective space is self-evident or primary; these works are images that represent a dimension of space that surrounds and interrupts the assignment of locations to measurable planes. Cézanne emphasizes that form emerges from a very different first dimension of the visible.[55]

This experimental amalgam of Owen with Merleau-Ponty does imply a radical interiority. Our result is something of a paradox: the authentic image that is alive and representative of the liveliness of nature is equally an image of a visible atmosphere that the individual person possesses as a unique interior to which others have no direct access. The six unique enclosed interiors of *Dao of Ink No. 10* (Fig. 4.15) help to convey this idea. The element of the visible that displays nature does double duty as an emptiness that also signifies the

[53] Merleau-Ponty (1993, p. 144).

[54] *Ibid.* (p. 142). Italics mine.

[55] *Ibid.* (p. 141).

viewer's own corporeality, according to Merleau-Ponty. This is not as unusual as some might think, and it coheres with some accounts of Chinese philosophy. For example, it may be argued that it coheres with a possible reading of Li Zehou's own contemporary account of *benti* or the "root" and "body" of things: Increasing awareness of one's own flesh as a singular uniqueness may imply that there is an interiority that is illegible from the standpoint of empirical knowledge. Some of Li Zehou's statements are open to the interesting suggestion that sensuous existence is nonobjective: For example, we can analyze his assertion that "each person's individual sensuous existence…is utterly unique." Again, it is arguable that "utter" uniqueness is privately revealed and not directly observed as an object or event by a third party or by others. It is Li himself who asks us to consider Cao Pi (187–226): "Cao Pi's discussion of *qi* in literature treats it as an innate quality of the body."[56] The parallel exists in Merleau-Ponty's claim that the visible is an innately displayed element of the individual person's own corporeality. Moreover, if we take Mencius (7A4) as referring to some elemental vastness or substance (*zhi*) "within me" that is the basis of moral force, then perhaps this Chinese text may be taken to imply that *qi* inheres within a field of sensuous existence that is a radical interiority. The claim about exemplary behavior in *Zhongyong I*—that one is "to be ever concerned about one's uniqueness"—gains new meaning, when "uniqueness" it defined in terms of Merleau-Ponty's language that refers to an interior element of the visible that consists of different samples distributed separately to each individual member of the community of self-sentient beings. Therefore, our experimental hypothesis—that Owen's term "sensuous norm" implies a deeper substance (*zhi*) that may be interpreted with the term "whole of the visible"—seems fruitful upon first inspection. However, anyone who asserts in the foregoing way that authentic images are pictorial representations of a radical interiority of extensiveness denoted by the terms "whole of the visible" and "substance" (*zhi*) must respond to objections by Ames and Hall. They insist that attentiveness to uniqueness in the *Zhongyong* "must not be read as a concession to anything like a radical subjectivity."[57]

Scholars of Chinese aesthetics may wish to experiment by combining passages from Li Zehou and remarks from Merleau-Ponty to create new interpretations for the terms "rhythmic vitality" (*qiyun)* and "substance" (*zhi*) in traditional texts such as *Bi fa ji*. Accepting Li Zehou's influence, we may suggest that *zhi* (substance) can be interpreted in terms of the utterly unique whole of the visible that belongs to the individual sensuous existence of the person who looks. In Merleau-Ponty's terms, we may say that brushwork creates a semblance of the constitutive emptiness of the visible that animates nature for the painter. Described in this new way, the traditional principle of the authentic image can help artists make authentically Chinese contributions to world culture. Paintings of nature are true to nature and alive, when they display the constitutive emptiness of the visible and not merely forms of things. This result is in keeping with Michael Sullivan's claim that the Chinese painter deliberately avoids completing all areas of the picture space, because what is entirely complete with respect to form or the representation of objects "cannot be true except in a very limited sense."[58] Moreover, an image displaying areas of emptiness or the element of the visible can remain alive even if it is illegible with respect to recognizable objects that can be visually perceived.

If our interpretation of substance in terms of the interior element of the visible holds up to scholarly inspection, then it can be argued that a genuine novelty for European philosophy and Merleau-Ponty in 1960–1961 has a history of more than a 1000 years in Chinese cultural thinking about art and nature. Thus, it is possible to appreciate both the originality of Merleau-Ponty's work as well as the long antecedent history of Chinese aesthetics and painting. Our results suggest that both cultural traditions are capable of articulating a manifest and observable element that is more radical than any human perceptual experience of an object, form, shape, pattern, or event. But this articulation is recessive or still resisted in modern and late-modern Euro-American academic cultures.[59] Merleau-Ponty's language does not diminish the originality and continuously Chinese character of the aesthetic standard of *qiyun*. For he himself states that what he refers to as "the visible" has "no name in philosophy."[60] We need to rephrase this more accurately, as "no name in European philosophy." Merleau-Ponty's remarks are advantageous not an obstacle: They imply that the Chinese aesthetic principle of the authentic image points to a unification with nature that is also of interest to art audiences outside of China that contain individuals possessing their respective interior elements of the visible.

The radical interiority discussed here in connection with Li Zehou and Merleau-Ponty is indeed novel in Euro-American aesthetics. Consider the contrast with Norman Bryson's use of the suggestive term "invisible body" in his description of painter's role in the process of painting. Gao Jianping invites us to apply Bryson's account, so that the brushwork of Chinese literati paintings may be regarded as traces of a process of creative acts.[61] This raises the question of whether Bryson uses the term "invisible body" with the intention of referring to the painter's possession of a "deeper" sensuous

[56] Zehou (2010, p. 63).

[57] Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Focusing the Familiar*, p. 45.

[58] Michael Sullivan, *The Arts in China*, p. 156.

[59] For remarks on recessive thinking and the comparison of cultures, see Hall and Ames (1995, p. xviii).

[60] Merleau-Ponty (1968, p. 147).

[61] Jianping (2012, p. 158).

norm of an utterly unique and interior whole of the visible that is private. The question is whether he means to use the term "invisible body" to denote the painter's possession of an immanent field of the visible in Merleau-Ponty's sense. The term "invisible body" is also relevant to an unstated implication of Li Zehou's double interpretation of embodiment: The individual being is aware of its own singularity and utterly unique sensuous existence that is invisible to a third party who may know that individual socially and historically. It seems that Bryson does not. He writes that brushstrokes left as traces on canvas or paper lead us to think of the "invisible body" of the artist who participated in original physical acts of creation. He is not describing the appearing of the formless extensiveness of *xiang* or the privacy of the visible that are central to our experimental interpretation of the authentic image. Bryson refers to the painter's musculature and physical presence:

> To understand the painting as sign, we have to forget the proscenic surface of the image and think behind it; not to an original perception in which the surface is luminously bathed, but to the body whose activity—for the painter as for the viewer—is always and only a transformation of material signs…it is outward, from its invisible musculature, rather than inwards, from its avid gaze, that all the images flow.[62]

Bryson does not address the hypothesis that *xiang* can be interpreted as an interior sensuous norm and medium by which the individual painter acquires an awareness of unique contact with nature. Instead, his account seems to describe the process of painting from the outside, from the standpoint of an observer or third party, who imagines the earlier physical activity and behavior of the painter.

5.5 Painting: Creating the Truth

We are in a position to offer a contemporary reading for Jing Hao's statement in *Bi fa ji* that the painter creates truth or authenticity (*chuangzhen*). Jing Hao makes this statement when he explains the fourth of the six principles. The line runs as follows: "Scene—give the proper sequence to the movement of the seasons, seek out the subtle to create the authentic."[63] Gao Jianping claims that this passage with the phrase "to create the authentic" requires an explanation: for surely, he argues, the truth is not something that is merely a human creation. The problem is clear: "If *zhen* [verity] can be created, then what is *zhen*?"[64] What must be explained is how an authentic image can remain true to nature and authentic, even when the image is created.

There are numerous passages in Chinese aesthetics that compare the literati process of making landscape paintings with the creation of the world. Gao directs our attention especially to three writers—Jing Hao, Zhang Yanyuan (815–877), and Shitao—each of whom describe the painter's relationship with the emerging painting as analogous to that of a semi-creator. Zhang Yanyuan describes how the painter, as a semi-creator of the natural world, should leave paintings with an *unfinished* aspect, so that life is revealed as the only true purpose, not the painting.[65] Shitao writes that the painter is a creator who generates law from no law: "Chaos is opened up when I put brush to paper to achieve clumsiness by discarding cleverness."[66] Gao Jianping reminds us that commentators take Shitao to mean that the painter who places a single stroke of ink on paper participates in a process similar to that described in *Daodejing,* where there is movement from Dao to the One, and then to the creation and awareness of the 10,000 particular things perceived in nature.

Given our results so far, it is possible to offer a provisional interpretation for Jing Hao's claim that the painter creates the truth, as well as Shitao's claim that the painter is a creator. As Gao Jianping notes, Shitao means to emphasize that this creative power springs from his own unique self, during the making of brush strokes, each one of which is "a simple visible fact as well as a metaphysical concept."[67] This creativity occurs precisely when brush unites ink with the constitutive emptiness of the visible displayed by the paper. We can say this: The painter creates the truth, with each single stroke on paper; for each stroke creates, at the same time, both the emptiness of the whole of the visible, and a chaos of many things, appearances, and phenomena. By leaving portions of the painting purposefully unfinished, the creative painter brings the art observer to a profound awareness of the unity that precedes the chaos of particular material things. This unity is conveyed by inclusion of the simple visible whole that is constitutive of the emptiness that is the individual person's own place of unification with nature. The painter is unified with nature during the making of the painting just as the observer is through viewing it.

To summarize, we have now an experimental interpretation for the principle of *qiyun* that can be used to assess the degree to which Jizi paintings depict the unification of self, nature, and the universe. There is a way in which images that are "alive" and authentic are also coextensive with images that represent the self's inseparability from nature. As Merleau-Ponty shows in the cases of Matisse's line drawings (Fig. 5.2) and Cézanne's watercolors (Fig. 5.3), images that

[62] Bryson (1983). For a related commentary on Bryson, see Jianping (2012, p. 158).

[63] Jing Hao (2000, p. 205).

[64] Jianping (2012, p. 278–282).

[65] *Ibid.* (p. 340).

[66] *Ibid.* (p. 354).

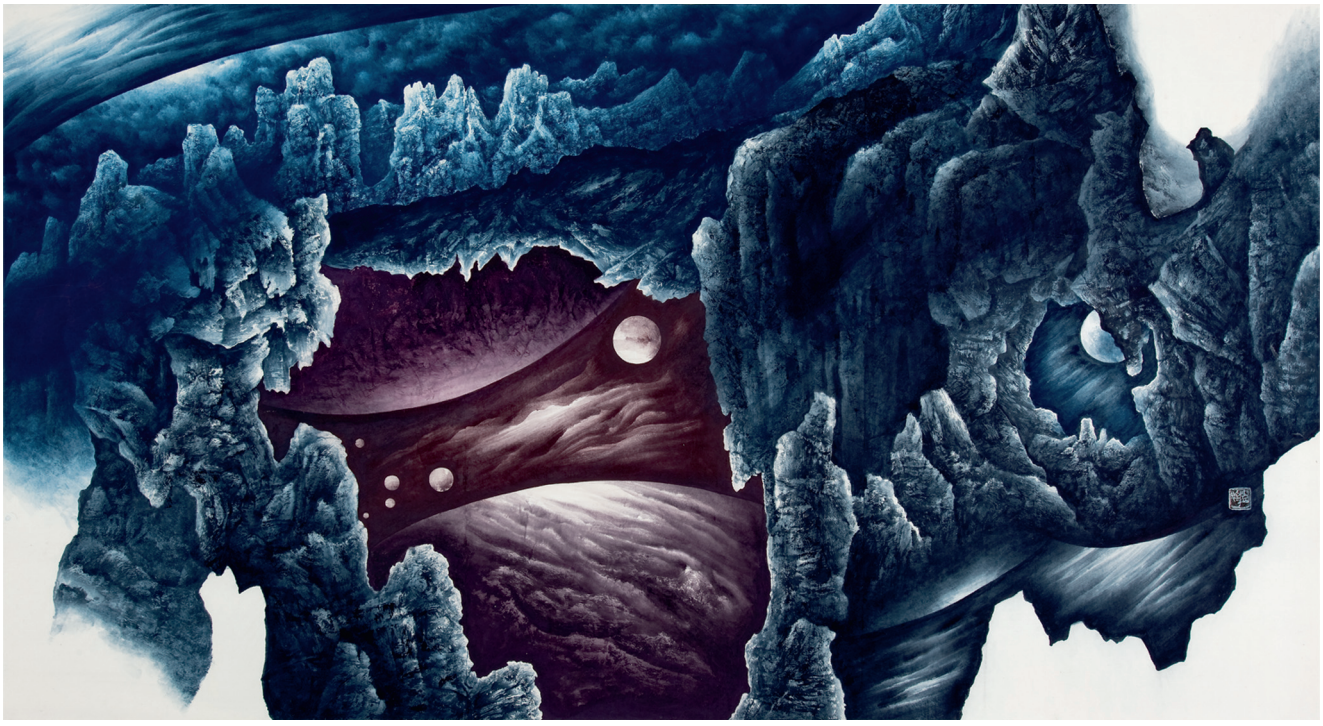
[67] *Ibid.* (p. 356).

display the hollow of paper, silk, or canvas do thereby also display the whole of the visible that is an emptiness constitutive of both the self and of observable nature. Therefore, by provisional experiment, we arrive at language for the special extensiveness associated with the substantial field (*zhi*) that is an element mentioned in the principle of the authentic image.

We can begin by asking exactly *where* in his compositions does Jizi create with ink and paper a hollow of the visible that resonates with the whole of the visible that is the individual person's openness to nature. By looking at his paintings, we will be able to assess whether Jizi represents phenomenal events as embedded within an expanse of an interior emptiness of the visible. We will be able to tell whether he represents each enclosed interior whole as unique and not directly accessible to others. His compositions show signs that the visible is an interior dimension that is possessed by other neighboring interiors that display their own respective instances. The next chapter does indeed suggest that such works as *Dao of Ink Series, No 10* (Fig. 4.15) and *Primeval Encounter* (Fig. 4.18) represent images of formlessness or emptiness expressive of unique interiors of individuals. We have now the premise that each expanse of the visible is an example of the interior and utterly unique sensuous existence that is innate to the individual person who is called a "sensible for itself" by Merleau-Ponty.[68] We may search with confidence that we may find in Jizi's paintings authentic images that manifest the spirit of objects within a visible expanse of emptiness that then resonates with the vitality of nature as the human person observes it. As we shall see, Jizi creates images of the unification of the individual person and universe, through interlocking enclosures of the extensiveness of the visible. Yu describes the spatial effect of the *Dao of Ink* paintings as "one where the exterior is the interior, and the interior is the exterior." This interpretation invites comparison with Merleau-Ponty's description of the effect of the visible: "I appear to myself turned inside out under my own eyes;" his outside becomes an inside and his inside an outside.[69] The medium of the visible becomes an internal hinge capable of unifying the inner and the outer. Jizi shows the visible emptiness of each individual in relation to other dimensions of a larger universe by means of the same device of interlocking areas.

[68] Merleau-Ponty (1968, p. 135).

[69] *Ibid.* (pp. 143–144).



Spiritual as Mountains and Cosmos

6

With new language for the way authentic images represent the union of the individual person with the texture of the visible, each art observer can begin to describe Jizi's achievement with more assurance. Four points deserve further elaboration. First, Jizi expresses the unification of self, nature, and universe through a signature style of enclosed areas and multiple interlocking dimensions. By compositional analysis, each one of us can confirm Jizi's success in making images that express unification of the microlevel of self with the field of natural phenomena and the macrolevel dimensions of the universe. Second, although there are signs of influence from Euro–American models of abstraction and surrealism, Jizi extracts elements from modern art only as a means for expressing Chinese philosophy more effectively in ink painting. Third, our assessment of his success in representing the individual person's own union with nature stems from applying a *new* interpretation for a traditional principle of rhythmic vitality (*qiyun*) initially expressed for landscape painting by Jing Hao during the Five Dynasties period (907–960). The philosophies expressed by Jizi's artworks are not merely reiterations of strands of neo-Confucianism that emerge fully during the Northern Song period. Through a comparison with Guo Xi's *Early Spring* (1072), we find that Jizi's paintings of unification express a social philosophy that is in keeping with present-day needs. Finally, fourth, his *Nebula Series* serves as evidence that a contemporary Chinese ink painter can present Chinese thinking about self and nature that will be of interest to global art audiences. The distinctness of Chinese thinking about self, nature, and universe is highlighted through a comparison of *Primal Nebula No. 5* (2011) with the philosophy of nature expressed in Piet Mondrian's *Tableau I: Lozenge with Four Lines and Gray* (1926).

6.1 Unification and Uniqueness

We can now describe how Jizi breaks with conventions of realism and modern abstraction in order to picture sources for the individual person's awareness of unification with visible nature and the dimension of the larger cosmos. His style of multiple interlocking enclosures reveals the unity and relatedness of four different domains: the sensuous norm of the element of the visible, the dimension of terrestrial phenomena available to human experience, the astronomical realm of planets and nebulae, and the dimension of invisible being or a greater universe joined to the spirit of Dao. Given the experimental account proposed here for the substantial field (*zhi*) of the authentic image that resonates with the vitality of nature, there is a standard available for evaluating whether the paintings of the *Dao of Ink Series* (2009) do actually represent the field of the visible that provides the individual person with a sensuous intersection with nature. With help from terms that Li Zehou and Merleau-Ponty circulate within their written philosophies, it can now be argued that Jizi creates images of the enclosed "constitutive emptiness" of the visible that belongs to the utterly unique sensuous existence observed by the individual person. Using the experimental interpretation for images that are authentic in a traditional Chinese sense, it is possible to test the hypothesis that *Dao of Ink Series No.10* (Fig. 4.15) and *Primeval Encounter* (Fig. 4.18) present images that qualify as authentic and resonant representations of the liveliness and vitality of actual life. This hypothesis is confirmed by examining the compositions of these two paintings in more detail. The analysis here lends support to Jizi's claim that his paintings are expressive of Chinese philosophical thinking about the way in which traditional Chinese landscape paintings convey a resonance that unifies the individual artist or art observer with nature: "*Dao of Ink* landscapes are in essence experiencing for oneself the complete process of transforming the spirit of Chinese philosophy into the spirit of Chinese art."[1]

Dao of Ink No. 10 (2009) and *Primeval Encounter* (2009) both depict utterly unique and elemental interiors of emptiness that are expressive of the visible wholes of the

[1] Jizi, *Reflections on Art,* No. 52.

D. A. Brubaker, C. Wang, *Jizi and His Art in Contemporary China,* Chinese Contemporary Art Series,
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monocular fields by which one looks at nature for oneself. In the case of *Dao of Ink No. 10* (Fig. 4.13), the painting delivers six different enclosed units where each is a unique and separate visible expanse displaying forms that vaguely resemble natural environments, phenomena of weather, or times of day and night. *No. 10* offers philosophical insight: the individual person's own consciousness of unique contact with nature is no mystery, for such contact is manifest in person through the privacy of the interior atmosphere that is the texture of the visible. The six interlocking interior areas participate in advancements and recessions in space, both relative to each other and also separately; for the space within each oscillates between an illusion of phenomena in three dimensions and a nonobjective immediacy or flatness of surface. This enables the painting to convey a neighborhood of six equal enclosures containing samples of the dimension of the visible, without imposing a hierarchy that subordinates one to another. By the medium of showing, Jizi helps late-modern philosophers to rethink the meaning of "sensuous existence" in novel nonmodern terms: there is an observable and utterly unique encounter with sensuous existence that is privately given, manifest to one who looks, and never an object experienced by others aside from oneself. Since a premise here is that *zhi* may be interpreted experimentally in terms of the visible, it may be argued that Jizi takes radical artistic steps to ensure that a composition such as *Primeval Encounter* emphasizes the substantial field (*zhi*) as an element essential to authentic images that resonate with nature as Chinese aesthetics describes. He removes all accidental or inessential forms from portions of the image in order to amplify—or pass spirit through—the formless element and general atmosphere of the visible. Four of the interiors are cleared of all consciousness of phenomenal appearances, and they are presented as enclosed areas of emptiness. The four "empty" areas are still images that qualify as authentic representations of nature, because each displays a hollow of the visible that resonates with the general texture of the visible that is constitutive of the painter's or art viewer's own unique sensuous existence.

Jizi's crafting of *Primal Encounter* is of special interest, because it gives the viewer a double shock that leads to a more radical way of interpreting the elemental content of nonobjective images. The first shock is achieved by absorbing the influence of modern abstract artists of the twentieth-century Euro–American avant-garde: the illusion of space created with traditional European forms of perspective is abandoned and replaced with emphasis on the material surface and the object-hood of pigment or supporting paper. The second shock is achieved by challenging avant-garde modernism: the perception of paper as a material surface plane in three-dimensional space is replaced with the more basic notion of a formless hollow of the visible that resonates with the element of the visible displayed in the unique sensuous existence of the individual person. Thus, Jizi breaks with nineteenth-century realist painters who habitually emphasize mere resemblance in form and shape with physical events and phenomena, and he breaks with late modern minimalists who reject pictorial representation in favor of the artworks that exemplify the actuality of nature defined in terms of physical object-hood or a three dimensionality that is directly perceived and experienced. *Primal Encounter* exhibits an intentional throwing together and mismatching of semi-representational areas in ink with enclosed interiors of empty formlessness; this gives the painting the quality of contemporaneousness described by Terry Smith.[2] The painting gives awareness of "multiplicitous complexity" and the "presentness" of the visible; it does not merely promote distanced reflection on perceptual experience of things. If we accept the hypothesis from Chinese aesthetics that an authentic image is one that displays a substance (*zhi*), and if "substance" (*zhi*) is interpreted experimentally as a unique instance of the sensuous field of the visible, then *Primeval Encounter* becomes an image that contains areas of emptiness that authentically represent the tissue of the visible that animates nature and enlivens it for the human observer. Therefore, Jizi's artistic representations do trace philosophical thinking, by showing the visible as a radical and utterly unique interior context observable to the individual person. As he notes, paintings can help philosophers: "Art is not philosophy, but art can answer some of the questions that philosophy raises."[3]

The six radical interiors represented by *Dao of Ink No. 10* and especially the four areas of emptiness in *Primeval Encounter* mark a style that subverts modern philosophies, art histories, and methods of art criticism that equate nature with events or processes that are objectively known through human operations of perceptual experience. The issue of which terms best describe Jizi's pictorial representations of personal contact with nature—"premodern," "postmodern," or "non-modern"—is for art historians and aestheticians of a new period to decide. What seems clear is that Jizi's paintings are sometimes about a microlevel of the individual person that is of interest. The paintings suggest that no visual experience of a natural phenomenon is ever merely free-floating within a conjunctive flux of experiences cognitive to each other; every visual phenomenon is associated with an appearing within a visual field private to the individual human observer. Each visual pattern consciously experienced by a given eyewitness is always bound

[2] Smith (2006, p. 703).

[3] Jizi, *Reflections on Art,* No. 40.

to the grain and animating texture of a field of the visible that is an utterly unique element of sensuous embodiment possessed and observed by that eyewitness only.[4] Each person who possesses a unique sample of the shimmering, metallic, and elemental texture of the visible can observe it for its own sake, without sliding into the modern attitude of empirical thinking that regards the visible as of trivial importance compared to the understanding of distinct natural phenomena and events that are causally related.

Once one observes that the dimension of the visible is manifestly one's own, then it is impossible to think of one's own existence as merely a psychological construct, an inner emotion, or a noumenal transcendental ego in Kant's sense. The case of *Dao of Ink No. 10* reminds us once again of both Merleau-Ponty's claim that each visible field as an indivisible and observable whole is constitutive of "a little world" of one's own and of Li Zehou's claim that individual sensuous existence is "utterly unique." Given his compositional device of interlocking enclosures of separate interiors, Jizi conveys pictorially an idea of a similarity between self and other with respect to an interior space, even though it is impossible for any one observer to witness the analogous space attributed to a neighbor. *Dao of Ink No. 10* shows one unique interior dimension of the visible (Fig. 4.16) that is of particular interest; it is joined by the membrane of white contour lines to four different neighbors that possess their own respective enclosures of a field of the visible. As Jizi's pictorial image clearly suggests, the possession by one neighbor of an interior similar to that possessed by another is presumed and impossible to verify from the standpoint of any one visible interior. Jizi expresses pictorially a thought about the presence of other interior wholes of the visible alongside but also separate from one's own.

Jizi experiments continue on in subsequent paintings to make images that represent what may be called a "formlessness" or "constitutive emptiness" that is never experienced as any particular form, pattern, or thing. The significance of his paintings can be described more easily by applying the thesis that I have already developed: namely, that the word "substance" (*zhi*) in Jing Hao's definition of the authentic image can be fruitfully reinterpreted in terms of a "secret visibility" (*une visibilité secret*) that is a "constitutive emptiness" (*un certain vide constituant*)—a spectacle of nature on the inside.[5] The painting entitled *Constructive Cosmos Series—Retroaction* (Fig. 6.2) is novel, because it represents the way in which an area of formlessness within a scroll-like band resonates with the formless of a dimension external to it. Jizi seems to pictorially represent the method and technique that the sage of the Stone Drum Cliff recommends for successful creation of an image that is alive, authentic, and resonant with nature. As it narrows toward the left, the rectangular area of unpainted white paper suggests great length and repeated practice: this suggests the idea that an image in the format of a traditional Chinese landscape painting is contained within the larger painting entitled *Retroaction.* (Or is it two scrolls and two upper-right corners?) This horizontal scroll-like band containing brushstrokes depicting mountains and waters is alive, because it is also an image containing an abundance of the element of the visible that is by hypothesis here a referent for the term "substance" (*zhi*) (Fig. 6.1). The scroll-like image contains an emptiness that resonates with areas of emptiness at the periphery. In effect, *Retroaction* is a contemporary ink painting that shows how a traditional Chinese landscape painting is an image that resonates with observable nature. The painting suggests that there are two ways in which the landscape scroll is related to nature: first, the forms of mountains in the scroll resemble the phenomenal mountain plateaus of similar shape at upper left and lower right; and second, the image of emptiness circulating within the scroll resonates with the visible fields emptied of all phenomenal things at the lower left and upper right corners. Since it is a Chinese landscape painting that contains images abundant with a constitutive emptiness that resonates formlessly with instances of the field of the visible, *Retroaction* is a companion piece with *Primeval Encounter* (Fig. 4.18).



Fig. 6.1 Jizi, *Constructive Cosmos Series—Retroaction*, 2009

With *The Limit of the World Series No. 1* and *No. 4* (2010) and also *Breeze Moon* (2009), Jizi experiments with images of the constitutive emptiness of the visible to suggest the inseparability of the microlevel of the visible with the macrolevel of deep cosmic distance. In *The Limit of the World Series No. 1* (Fig. 6.3), the two fragments of internal formlessness, at the center, seem at times to overlap the mountainous and planetary dimensions beyond. This configuration is perhaps

[4] Merleau-Ponty (1968, pp. 205–206).

[5] Merleau-Ponty (1964; pp. 22, 76, 1993; pp. 125, 144).



Fig. 6.2 Detail of Jizi, *Constructive Cosmos Series—Retroaction,* 2009. Ink on paper, 184 × 145 cm



Fig. 6.3 Jizi, *The Limit of the World Series No. 1,* 2010. Ink on paper, 184 × 145 cm

still suggestive of authentic images that resonate with the visible element belonging to the individual person's own microlevel observation of nature. However, with *Breeze Moon* (Fig. 6.4), it is as if Jizi inserts areas of formlessness into some of the interlocking wholes of *Dao of Ink No. 13* of 2009 (Fig. 4.17). This insertion suggests to the art observer that the fragments of the visible appearing in Jizi's paintings are not dedicated always and exclusively to conveying the visible field that unites the utterly unique self-existence of the individual person with observable nature. In keeping with this new suggestion, one may say that *The Limit of the World Series No. 4* (Fig. 6.5) presents spaces of emptiness that appear to be positioned behind the visible dimension containing layers of phenomenal mountains and planets. Since this painting presents some areas of emptiness as dimensions in slight special recession, it might be argued that it suggests dimensions that are outside direct human observation that occurs within the individual person's own immediate sensuous existence.

When the word "visible" is used to interpret Jing Hao's aesthetic of the authentic image, it is easier to accept Jizi's claim that he continues and extends the tradition of Chinese ink wash painting in novel ways that have no precedent in the enduring achievements of Jing Hao, Guo Xi, and Shitao. The cavernous enclosures in *Dimension of the Cosmos No. 1* (Fig. 6.6) surely emphasize deep cosmic distance with a directness that differs from Shitao's hand scroll entitled *Outing to Zhang Gong's Grotto* (ca. 1700). It can also be argued now that Jizi implements Jing Hao's principles in a bolder and more radical way, since he creates some images that are entirely cleared of form and yet still resonant with the animating element of the visible that gives nature vitality and actuality from the point of view of the individual person who looks. Traditional Chinese landscape painters such as Jing Hao or Shitao often create images that place an equal emphasis on a formlessness that resonates with the vitality of nature and forms and patterns that resemble the scenery of mountains and waters. By contrast, Jizi eliminates scenery, brushstroke, and ink entirely in some enclosed areas to emphasize more strongly the emptiness of paper; as a result, he creates strong contemporary images suggestive of an interior sensuous field of the visible that is closer to nature than perceptual experiences that emphasize cognitive consciousness of par-

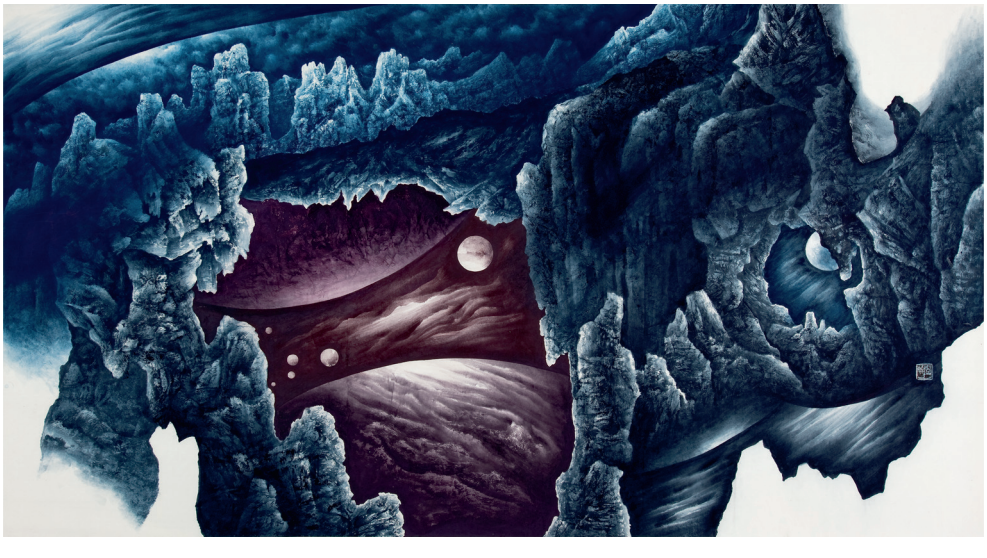


Fig. 6.4 Jizi, Jizi, *Breeze Moon* 2009. Ink and color on paper, 184 × 145 cm



Fig. 6.5 Jizi, *The Limit of the World Series No. 4*, 2010. Ink and color on paper, 195 × 185 cm

Fig. 6.6 Jizi, *Dimensions of the Cosmos No. 1,* 2010. Ink and color on paper, 145 × 266 cm



ticular forms of natural phenomena. As a result, many of his paintings jolt the contemporary viewer into thoughtfulness about the visible as a constitutive emptiness—a "lake of nonbeing"—that provides a sensuous element of privileged union with animate nature. While the texture of the visible seems like an emptiness or nothingness compared to changing phenomenal shapes, patterns, and processes that are perceptually experienced and clearly understood, it is a spectacle inseparable from the two monocular fields that belong to one's own eyes.

6.2 Images of the Spectacle of Sentient Being

Jizi's writings and paintings are also of interest, because they offer some answers for questions that philosophers raise about the meaning of such terms as "religious experience" and the "wisdom of enlightenment." This is especially evident once the term "the visible" is used first to differentiate images that are authentic according to traditional Chinese aesthetics and then a second time to describe how the sense organ of the eye shows an emptiness that is a basis for enlightenment about one's own nature as a sentient being. According to Jizi, his paintings address a spiritual need that many people have today, without privileging the religious doctrines or narratives of one religion over those of another. He adds that his paintings that meet this need are open to access by different individuals who may come with Confucian, Daoist, Buddhist, or secular manners of interpretation.[6] While Jizi's written reflections about art exhibit a wide range of cultural influences, one reflection of particular interest uses Buddhist terms to emphasize the intuitions that guide an artist in creating artworks about the unity of the larger universe and the microlevel of the unique person's life within nature. Consider his brief remarks in *No. 46*:

> With regard to the nature of the transcendent unity of Heaven and humanity, [the] Buddhists refer to it [in many ways] as: *Bhutatathata*, the emptiness of the nature of things, *Tathagata, nirvana,* the emptiness of all *dharmas*, the emptiness of all things causally produced, the Buddha and I are [one] not two [i.e. all sentient beings have the Buddha nature], and the *dharma* realm of the one reality. Laozi referred to it as "non-being." If an artist is capable of intuiting these terms, then the artwork will be "spirited," and this is called "perfect understanding of one's nature."[7]

The immediate point of interest in the translation here is the use of the Buddhist term *bhūtatathatā* for the Chinese term 真如 (*zhenru*) that appears in Jizi's original text. The term *zhenru* joins the character 真(*zhen*) that carries the meaning of the English word "reality" together with 如(*ru*) that has the meaning of "thus always." Thus, in suggesting that each artist intuit the term *zhenru,* Jizi calls for an intuiting of a referent that is also frequently described as resembling "the ocean in the waves," as an ultimate immutable source of all phenomena that nonetheless contrasts with form and phenomena, and as "buddha-nature" (佛性).[8] It is 真如 (*zhenru*) that is often translated by contemporary custom as *tathatā* (*suchness, thusness*). By using the term *tathatā* in reference to spirited art expressive of the unity of universe and one's nature as a sentient being, Jizi marks an avenue of language that art critics and historians may explore to develop a more complete account of his process of artistic creation and of the awareness that enables an artist to create paintings about the vital union of each unique person with nature, others, and larger universe. By developing and applying an account—however approximate—of *tathatā* and of the *tathāgata*'s awakening to *suchness,* the art critic and art historian may begin to appreciate more fully Jizi's achievement and the significance of his paintings at this historical moment in Chinese culture and the globalization of contemporary Chinese art.

To develop a provisional interpretation of *tathatā* so that critics and art historians can assess more clearly what Jizi's writings and paintings are about, I find it useful and appropriate to make use of the discussion of *tathatā* in the *Platform Sutra* attributed to Huineng (638–713), a founder of Chan Buddhism in the Tang dynasty (618–907). In Huineng's text, it is introspection leading to awareness of *tathatā* and one's own true nature that brings forth an immanent wisdom (*prajñā*) refreshing to each person. Whoever has this awareness or realization is free "to put one's own essence of *tathatā* into operation; to use *prajñā* for contemplation; to take an attitude of neither indifference nor attachment toward all things…."[9] How is this awakening to *tathatā* to be described? For Huineng, the *tathāgata* who puts *tathatā* into operation is one who "illuminates the six gates [of sensation] and purifies them."[10] At the very least, this may be taken to mean that awareness of one or more of one's own six sense organs (such as the sense organ of one's own eyes) is *compatible* with awareness of *tathatā*—or *suchness*—and an awakening that leads to the wisdom of enlightenment. The requirement important for bringing forth this awareness is that the *tathāgata* who still retains an awareness of the sense organs needs to suspend all consciousness of perceptual thinking about distinct sense objects and events. It is thoughts about sense *objects*—or the acts of cognitive taking and making that occur during perceptual experience of particular phenomena and the understanding of causal relationships between phenomena—that leads to defilement of the sense organs and loss of one's awareness of *tathatā*.[11] However, Huineng does not stop with this. It seems that he also adds a more radical claim that is key to the development of a contemporary interpretation of *tathatā* that critics and art historians may then use to assess and compare contemporary paintings and artworks by Jizi and others.

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[6] Jizi, conversation, January 1, 2013, Beijing.

[7] Jizi, Reflections on Art, No. 46.

[8] William Edward Soothill and Lewis Hodous, *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms,* Digital Version: Digital Archives Section, Library and Information Center of Dharma Drum Buddhist College, 2010.10.13; p. 803. http://buddhistinfomatics.ddbc.edu.tw/glosseries.

[9] Huineng (1990, p. 82). Wong Mou-Lam's English translation of 1929 was published the following year in Shanghai.

[10] *Ibid.* (p. 91).

[11] *Ibid.* (p. 97).

The second claim expressed in the *Platform Sutra* is that observation of one or more of one's own sense organs is the basis for noticing the dimension of *tathatā* or suchness that furnishes evidence of one's own original or authentic nature as a sentient being. It is one's own awareness of a sense organ for the sake of a *suchness* or *thusness* (or an unchanging element that is "always thus") that enables one to acquire at firsthand the wisdom of enlightenment. This is a very different practice from that of experiencing the existence of one's own eyes by using the same criteria that any ophthalmologist or neuroscientist will use as a third party: namely, objective experience of some functional capacity or else digital scans that reveal activity in parts of the brain associated with a functional response to visual stimuli. To put this another way, the *Platform Sutra* suggests a second and more radical claim that observation of the sense organ of one's own eye is the basis for noticing the element of *tathatā* (*suchness*) that reveals one's own nature as a sentient being. Evidence for this second claim is suggested in the following passage:

> Without *tathatā* the sense organs and the sense objects would perish immediately. Learned audience, because it is the attribute of *tathatā* that gives rise to idea, our sense organs—in spite of their functioning in seeing, hearing, touching, knowing, and so on—need not be tainted or defiled in all circumstances, and our true nature may be self-manifested all the time.[12]

Here Huineng suggests that *tathatā* is necessary for observing one's own a sense organ or for having any experiences whatsoever of natural phenomena; for example, the observation of *tathatā* is necessary for the perception of a visual phenomenon that one witnesses by eye. Moreover, the awareness of *tathatā* gives rise to an idea of *tathatā,* even though this idea denotes some element that is never perceptually experienced as an object. Huineng suggests that the gateway of the sense organ of the eyes need not be tainted all the time—it remains a doorway for the wisdom of enlightenment—because one can at times observe it differently. The individual person has the capacity to observe that the organ of the eye manifests *tathata* and not merely particular phenomena and things in visual experience. The hypothesis for consideration is this: once the appearing of *tathatā* gives you the idea that *tathatā* is a basic element essential to the actual practice of seeing phenomena, you can think of your own nature as a sentient being as always manifest, no matter what kind of phenomena you may happen to experience. When one is aware of one's own sense organ of the eye and has an awareness of *tathatā* without thought for experiences of sense *objects* or events, one moves from tranquility to awareness of one's own nature and enlightenment. Yet, this help from Huineng still leaves a person of today wondering: what is the element on display in one's own sense organ of the eye that reveals one's own nature freed from experiences of visual phenomena and events?

One more step by Huineng must be outlined, so that the account here of *tathatā* and 真如 (*zhenru*) can be applied by the critic or art historian who seeks to assess Jizi's remarks on painting and the intuiting of immanent roots of what is called "religious experience." What remains is to interpret "suchness" or *tathatā* in Huineng's sense—or the display of the sense organ of one's own eyes—with the language already developed here for describing the sensuous field of the visible as an element privately displayed. To give meaning to Jizi's suggestive reflections on *tathatā* (真如, *zhenru; suchness*) and on intuiting one's own nature as a sentient being (or one's buddha-nature), it is a start to suggest that "the visible"—the same term already inserted experimentally to explain *zhi* (*substance*)—be applied with the same meaning, so that awareness of *tathatā* with respect to the sense organ of the eye is interpreted as an awareness of the texture of the visible. In short, an observer's awareness of the emptiness of all visual phenomena causally produced comes with the awareness that all such phenomena are appearances within a relatively stable visible texture or *suchness* that is one's own nature. The field of the visible interpreted experimentally as *tathatā* (真如,*zhenru*) is an elemental source for all of one's own experiences of visual phenomena. At the same time, it is a persisting and unchanging source of one's own nature as a sentient being that contrasts with all phenomena experienced as events causally dependent on each other. Jizi is correct that one may as a painter develop an intuition or idea of one's own nature and express this intuition pictorially in art, for one's own nature is constituted by a private display by eye of the field of the visible that resonates with artistic images on paper that contain an abundance of the hollow of the visible.

One of Jizi's achievements is to pictorially represent the paradox of the visible. He creates images that resonate with an element of the visible that is private, familiar to each person who possesses an instance, never visible as a sensuous object in the eye of another, and never experienced in perceptual understanding as a public neutral object that participates in causal relations between phenomena. Awareness of one's own existence as a sentient being may lead then to pictorial representation of a formless visible field that is not mentioned in scientific observation statements or in scientific generalizations about what is known to exist. Wisdom about one's own authentic nature does not yet emerge from mere tranquil nonattachment to experiences of things, for that promotes indifference and a failure to put awareness of one's own nature as a sentient being into practice. One who makes and exhibits paintings with images that resonate with the element of the visible is one who puts awareness

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 97.

of one's own nature and the wisdom of enlightenment into actual practice.

Jizi is quite correct when he claims that an intuition about the emptiness of all phenomenal things experienced as causally interacting can lead to the intuiting of one's own nature or buddha-nature and the creation of an artwork. Once *tathatā* is interpreted in terms of the innate principle of the field of the visible, the meaning of the Buddhist term *tathatā* mentioned in Jizi's reflections about art can be compared with the compositions that he actually creates as a painter. *Primeval Encounter* (Fig. 4.18) can now be interpreted as conveying the constitutive emptiness of the field of the visible and as facilitating the idea of one's own nature as a sentient being. Here is an artist who uses brush and ink to suggest the thought that the field of the visible is an inward enclosure delivered by eye. Here is a practical example of contemporary art that may be said to be an image of an observable element of union with nature that is never experienced in perception as a form, shape, pattern, or event. Jizi shows us that the purpose of art is sometimes and by intention not merely about the production of knowledge or cognition for its own sake.[13]

The art observer prepared in advance with this or some similar interpretation of *tathatā* and the visible can appreciate and describe more fully the cultural relevance of the four areas of "emptiness" in *Primordial Encounter.* The painting contains images of the enclosed and formless emptiness of separate visible fields, and the image of these areas of emptiness can bring the art observer closer to an awareness that the field of the visible is evidence of the art observer's own vitality that is manifest even without being experienced as a sensuous object or event by a third party. To use Merleau-Ponty's terms, this is to acquire an awareness of oneself as a *sensible for oneself.*[14] It is possible to say now that *Primordial Encounter* represents the texture of the visible that is a source for wisdom about sentient life that is conveyed by no scientific discipline that expresses causal knowledge about material processes. In this way, we can affirm that Jizi's contemporary paintings are, as he implies, expressive of the Buddhist term *suchness* (tathatā) and of a wisdom about the vitality of life that resonates with many people today who seek some refreshment, not provided by materialist attitudes, without departing from the presentness of life in nature.

6.3 Painting Heritages: Retaining and Absorbing

With regard to Jason Kuo's categories of contemporary ink art, Jizi is both a synthesizer and an interrogator. He absorbs styles of abstraction from currents in modern art. Yet, he also questions cannons of traditional Chinese painting that specify the need for particular types of brushwork, prohibit dead ink, or judge semiabstract uses of white paper as improper. Yu Fan argues that Jizi absorbs influences from Euro–American cultures to develop ink wash painting in keeping with Chinese aesthetics, not to reform it with an entirely new style and content.[15] One way to test Yu Fan's opinion is to compare Jizi's paintings with Euro–American artists who advance features of the sort that Jizi absorbs from abroad. In this regard, we can conduct some comparisons of Jizi art with various paintings by Paul Cézanne, Arthur Dove, René Magritte, and M. C. Escher. If the comparisons reveal that Jizi absorbs influences from abroad and still creates paintings that satisfy the experimental interpretation that I propose for images that are authentic according to traditional Chinese aesthetics, then Yu Fan's conclusion will be upheld. The comparisons below do ultimately suggest that Jizi uses images of a formless element of the visible in a way that the four Euro–American artists do not; he uses them to represent a gateway observable within the sense organ of the eye that implies cosmic dimensions at a more macrolevel.

Paul Cézanne is sometimes said to create paintings with images of an element of the visible that persists as a general atmosphere and foundation for changing visual experiences and moments of perceptual focus. The blurry and unfocused peripheral areas in his *Large Pine and Red Earth* (1890–1895) suggest the unique point of view of a singular individual who looks at nature. But the artistic subject here suggests that Cézanne is still firmly committed to an ultimate subject matter consisting of focused perceptions of the distinct central branches of the pine. Perhaps *Large Pine* can be considered as a distant precursor to *Dao of Ink No. 10* (Fig. 4.15): Cezanne's painting still lacks the enclosing contours and the radical emphasis on the interiority of the visible. In his later watercolors, Cézanne does boldly leave unfinished areas of white. As noted earlier, Merleau-Ponty cites Cézanne's late watercolors, such as *Mont Sainte-Victoire* (Fig. 5.3), as paradigmatic displays of a hollow of the visible that is prior to experience of particular colors, forms, and dimensions of measurement. Clearly, Merleau-Ponty means to suggest that such hollows of formless visibility in Cezanne's paintings resonate with the element of the visible that is constitutive of the human viewer's own sensuous existence. Still, I am suggesting that Jizi's paintings have an additional significance because they show by example that yet another artistic step is possible; his compositions of enclosed visible wholes of emptiness enable him to emphasize—in a way that Cézanne does not—that the animating field of the visible is a unique interiority privileged to a seer.

[13] Goodman (1968, p. 258).

[14] See Merleau-Ponty (1968, pp. 135).

[15] Yu Fan, Ink Paintings: Existence and Transcendence—A Review of Jizi's Art, p. 115.

Jizi provides the art observer with examples of nonobjective images that represent the extensiveness of the visible as inseparable from both individual self-sentience and the liveliness of nature. What Cézanne leaves as a blurriness in relation to some normative perceptual experience, Jizi presents boldly and directly as a formlessness that constitutes the intimate sensuous union of the individual person with nature. Jizi also goes farther than Cézanne in representing a larger universe—invisible being—that is beyond direct eyewitnessing. With regard to the macrolevel, Cézanne hints at a dimension beyond appearances and particular colors, by leaving unfinished areas of white. But Jizi makes images from a point of view or position already within the larger universe and far beyond direct human experience embodied within the eye. He depicts the interlocking of many dimensions, including one of deep distance that differs from the individual person's own utterly unique field of the visible (Fig. 6.6).



Fig. 6.7 Arthur Dove, *Me and the Moon*, 1937. Wax emulsion on canvas, 45.72 × 66.04 cm

Jizi experiments with contour edges and surfaces in *Dialogue with Dao Series No. 6* (Fig. 4.12) in order to harmonize the space of three-dimensional depth with geometrical figures that impose flatness and enclosed surface areas. One can find similar concerns in Arthur Dove's *Abstraction No. 2* (1910) where a strong black contour separates a uniformity of space reminiscent of trees and leaves from a nonobjective surface texture of vivid yellow. *Abstraction No. 2* has a bold immediacy of surface color and texture that may be characteristic of modern works that influenced Jizi. Yet, this painting by Dove is an impressionist abstraction, based on a fleeting glimpse of conditions of light on a living movement in nature; indeed, the inspiration for the central form is perhaps a moving butterfly that displays vivid color under what Dove refers to as "a condition of light."[16] Moreover, Dove's painting implies a positivity of color possessed by a thing; there is no image of a formless texture of the visible that is more basic even than perceptual experience of the being of yellow. By contrast, Jizi would probably treat the dimension of yellow as both an interiority and an outside relative to some inside located elsewhere in the painting. Dove's *Me and the Moon* (1937; Fig. 6.7) comes closer to some of Jizi's compositions, because it experiments with enclosed areas, neighboring fragments, and even mountain peaks that display high-contrast edges. However, the areas in Dove's painting are still structured mainly by conventions of verisimilitude, and the contour edges do not participate in the radical spatial reversals of the sort that develop around the ridgelines of Jizi's monumental landscape *Flying Snow No. 2* (2010; Fig. 6.8). Dove does not break so thoroughly with convention and does not create the interlocking enclosures where an exterior can be reversed spatially into an interior. To summarize, Jizi absorbs some features from modern art movements abroad; however, his microlevel emphasis on formless interiors of "emptiness" remains original and well suited to his purpose of conveying philosophical thinking about self in union with nature that is distinctively Chinese.

The boldness of Jizi's contemporary ink paintings can also be compared productively with modern surrealist paintings. Surrealist works such as Rene Magritte's *The False Mirror* (1928; Fig. 6.9) use realism to subvert the conventions and meanings habitually associated with realism of representation. Surrealism is an antirealism that challenges the assumption that contact with nature consists of rationally meditated experiences of empirical phenomena. With this painting, Magritte creates multiple readings that subvert any attempt to assess his work merely by the standard of verisimilitude. First, Magritte suggests that the human eye is not a mirror that reflects nature dispassionately; instead, it reflects the interior expectations and desires of the unconscious housed in a material body. Second, if we imagine *The False Mirror* as providing a mask with peepholes, then the art viewer looks out onto a serene world and is met by an opaque obstacle that subverts and disrupts complacency. Third, on a more optimistic and even spiritual reading, Magritte may be suggesting that the interior life of the eye is not at its heart the physiological phenomena studied by the natural scientist. On the contrary, the eye of the beholder consists of a private atmosphere of the visible that animates each personal observation of the natural world.

Jizi's familiarity with surrealism is suggested when he makes use of his imagination in the creation of *Dao of Ink No. 4* (2009; Fig. 6.10, 6.11). The confluence of clouds and planets in the universe suggests the appearance of what seems to be an eye. This reading is strengthened by what is

[16] Hartel (2011, pp. 39).



Fig. 6.8 Jizi, *Flying Snow No. 2*, 2010. Ink and color on paper, 145 × 366 cm



Fig. 6.9 René Magritte, *The False Mirror*, 1928 (54 cm × 81 cm)

unmistakably an eye with tears in *Untitled* (2009; Fig. 6.12), a painting completed by Jizi during the same year. In *Dao of Ink No. 4,* the eye looks out at the art observer who looks back through it at the unfolding universe as a whole, not at particular physical bodies. The eye is imagined as something embedded in the dimension of the constructed cosmos. By contrast, the frame and context for Magritte's *The False Mirror* seems to be the phenomenal and even biological realm of material bodies. Magritte treats the eye as the context for an imagined image of clouds, whereas Jizi treats an image of clouds as the context for an implied or imaginary eye of nature and the cosmos looking back at the human viewer. Jizi's paintings offer many promising avenues for further comparisons with surrealist works. Once an art observer begins to anticipate the inclusion of surreal images of eyes within Jizi's compositions, the images of *Primeval Encounter* begin to exhibit startling juxtapositions that bring two instances of the emptiness of the field of the visible into contact with representations, suggesting the sclera and iris of one eye stacked above the iris or pupil of another (Fig. 4.19). Thus, this painting is doubly an icon for the intriguing thought that the organ of the eye is the site for a display of the inwardness of the element of the visible. To take another example, *Sky Aura* (2009; Fig. 6.14), is a variation on the structure of interlocking dimensions: the floral shapes are suggestive of Salvador Dali's practice of combining both the organic and the inorganic in one object. But Dali's spaces are often removed from nature, and there is no sign of an oasis of observable formlessness to balance subconscious desires for things (Fig. 6.13).

Jizi's adherence to the principles of Chinese aesthetics is evident, when we compare his compositions with those of E. C. Escher. Both artists create interlocking areas and Gestalt shifts between different perceptual experiences of the space presented by a single figure. But Jizi goes beyond making images of spatial ambiguity to the Chinese aesthetic of the authentic image: his paintings display a deeper sensuous element of the visible that resonates with the vitality of actual life. By contrast, Escher's creativity offers only images that give alternating perceptions of things. In general, Escher's compositions do not qualify as authentic images according to our provisional interpretation of the principle of the authentic image in traditional Chinese aesthetics. I conclude that they do not qualify, because Escher does not pass spirit through the sensuous norm of visible, a sensuous norm of emptiness, that is deeper than the perceptual appearances of things. He passes spirit through the external pattern and not through his own observable instance of the substantial field of the visible—the flickering texture that is a spectacle of no thing in particular.



Fig. 6.10 Jizi, *Dao of Ink Series No. 4,* 2009. Ink and color on paper, 84 × 145 cm



Fig. 6.11 Jizi *No. 4,* 2009

Escher's *Puddle* (1952; Fig. 6.15) is of particular interest as a possible exception, since it pictures contour edges that enclose an area that emphasizes a white formlessness and not just phenomenal appearances of leaves, branches, and trees. Thus, it offers a good basis for comparison with Jizi's *Dao of Ink No. 10* (Fig. 4.15); both artists challenge customary ways of seeing nature. In *Puddle,* the interior area of the puddle appears to recede into the distance as a dimension of nature that differs from the surrounding dimension of human habitation experienced as muddy materiality and machines. At least some traces of human steps are newly filled with seepage from the lake-like surface that is alive as an image because it includes areas of emptiness. Yet, the lively dimension that pictures living trees and an alternative to mere mud is upside down, remote, and after a few moments subsumed



Fig. 6.12 Jizi, *Untitled*, 2009. Ink on paper, 248 cm × 124 cm



Fig. 6.13 Jizi, *Untitled*, 2009. Ink on paper, 248 × 124 cm



Fig. 6.14 Jizi, *Sky Aura*, 2009. Ink and color on paper, 195 × 184 cm

back into the overriding perceptual framework of realism and experiences of things. While there is some slight hint of a hollow of the visible in the surface of the puddle, this effect is almost entirely suppressed in the end by the overall realism. The small areas of white are ultimately transfigured by realist thinking back into commonplace reflections of a sky that belongs to the same physical dimension of phenomenal causes and effects as the tire tracks. Escher's inventiveness is also shocking, because he offers—with *Gallery* (1946), *Other World* (1947), and *Relativity* (1953)—*no* escape from a life always orchestrated in the form of one realist gestalt or another. His experiments with ambiguous figure perception ultimately reinforce the cultural practice of observing life according to conventions of realism of representation. By contrast, Jizi shocks the art observer out of the habit of relying on the conventions of realism and verisimilitude, and he helps each of us appreciate that one's own nature consists of an individual sensuous existence—such as a field of the visible displayed by eye—that cannot be experienced as a pattern of things.

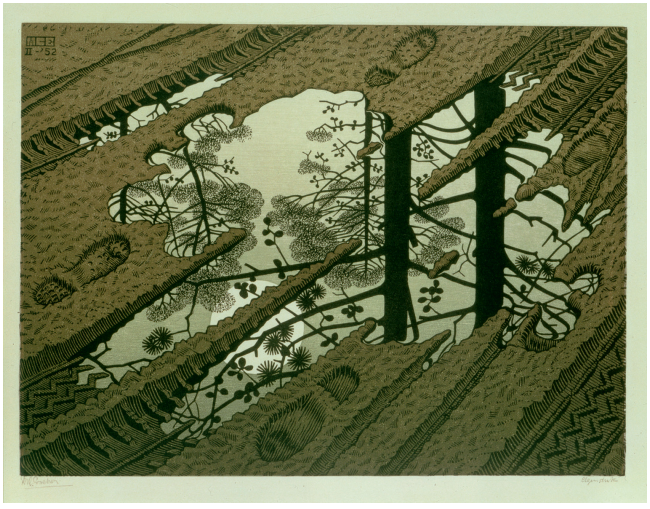


Fig. 6.15 E. C. Escher, *Puddle*, 1952. Woodcut, 24 × 31.9 cm

6.4 Comparison: Guo Xi's *Early Spring*

Do Jizi's compositions express a philosophy of unification suitable for life in the present, when it is Jing Hao's text from the Five Dynasties period that guides the evaluation of Jizi's success in expressing the unification of the individual person with universe? One way to address this question is to compare Jizi's compositions with Guo Xi's *Early Spring* (Fig. 6.16). Does the philosophical content that Stanley Murashige assigns to Guo Xi's painting differ from that philosophical thinking expressed by Jizi's paintings? Guo Xi's paintings and writings on art belong to the Northern Song period and an environment of neo-Confucianism characterized by a confluence of Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist thinking. After comparing compositions, it is clear that there are three significant differences: Jizi's signature emphasis on enclosed fields of the visible makes it plain that a painting that satisfies the new interpretation of authenticity extracted from Jing Hao's text can still meet the needs of individual persons living in the present. The conclusion I reach is that some cannons of traditional Chinese aesthetics can still be helpful as guides for the creation of ink paintings are that contemporary in composition and social philosophy.

Guo Xi's *Early Spring* contains ambiguities, spatial reversals, contexts that produce changing identities, projections and recessions, and finally cycles in which three-dimensional objects shift into nonobjective textures or surfaces. Stanley Murashige's art historical analysis of *Early Spring* is an important aid for conducting a comparison with Jizi's artworks. Murashige describes how the creeping edge of a dark contour meandering at lower left changes function from shadow, to ravine, and then to shoreline. Guo Xi discourages fixed perception of objects, since shapes appear as "shifting surfaces reflected against a background of surrounding

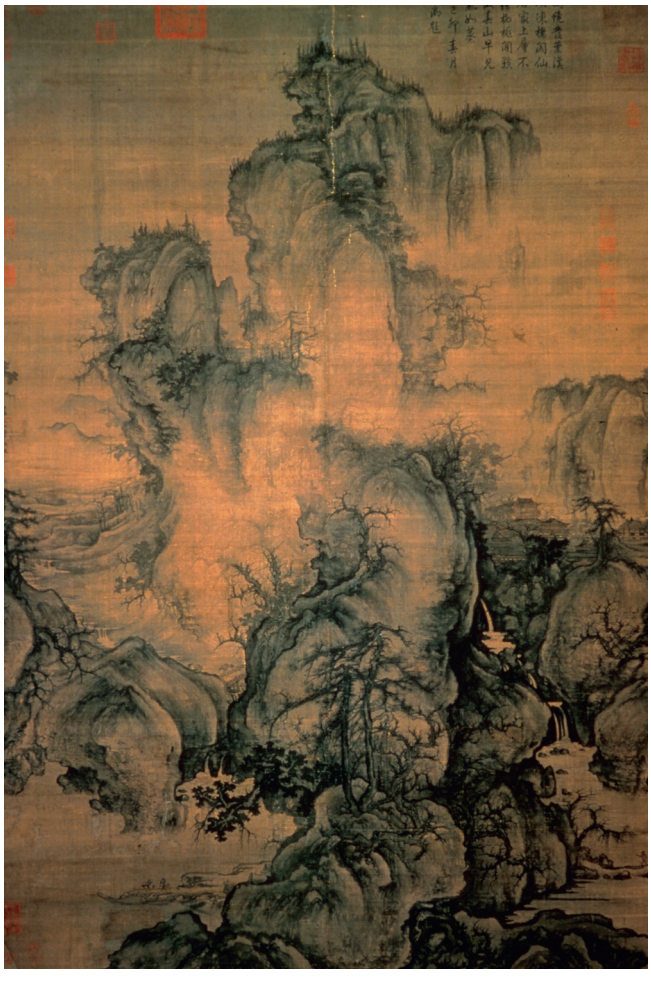


Fig. 6.16 Guo Xi, *Early Spring*, 1072. Ink on silk, 158.3 × 108.1 cm

shapes." [17] Both Jizi and Guo Xi use open and meandering contours. However, one difference is this: Guo Xi seems to wander with contours to create a succession of changing objects, whereas Jizi uses contours to make interlocking enclosures where meandering within nature is always a wondering within the element of the visible.

With regard to philosophical content, Murashige makes three claims about *Early Spring*. First, in regard to the influence of Confucianism, he reminds us that both the *Analects* and *Early Spring* imply that individuals have shifting roles and purposes within a network of relationships with other individuals. Thus, *Early Spring* is to an extent Confucian, in that "forms in *Early Spring*—whether rocks, trees, water, or spaces—obtain their individuality in the context of other juxtaposed forms."[18] Placement in relationship with other forms determines identity. Second, Murashige notes that Guo Xi himself suggests an analogy that has social implications: the tall pine is related to the mountain as the minister or sage is

[17] Murashige (1995, p. 345).

[18] *Ibid.* (p. 350).

to the "great lord." It can be argued that particular rocks and trees depend for their unity on the one mountain, just as individuals in society are harmonized by imperial power. Third, *Early Spring* relates the existence of things to the presence of the human observer. Given Guo Xi's claim that several thousand mountains are manifestations of the one mountain, Murashige infers that the mountain's existence depends, in some part, on qualities of interest to human sensibility. As for the meaning of "human sensibility," Murashige's text suggests several definitions: "physical proportion, point of view, the substance of textures and surfaces, and the physical drama of space, time, and of growth."[19] Before proceeding, it is important to note that there is another interpretation available: "human sensibility" may also be described in terms of the element of the visible that belongs to the utterly unique sensuous existence of the individual person.

What can an art observer conclude about Jizi's painting from reading Murashige's analysis of Guo Xi's *Early Spring*? Guo Xi uses contours in a way that makes the one mountain—and some unseen creative principle of rhythm—into a foundation that unifies the many phenomenal objects and surface facets. Using traditional materials, he makes the mountain into a single principle that incarnates different facets composed of mutable trees, rocks, and human individuals. By comparison, Jizi takes a different approach: he creates a foundational diversity of different dimensions and facets that seem more resistant to the notion of hierarchy. If Guo Xi expresses social hierarchy in the composition of *Early Spring,* then Jizi expresses a different social harmony and power that depends on clusters of unique individuals who share in the wisdom that each possesses a unique interior as a sentient being (Fig. 4.15). For Jizi, the implicit principle is that there is no mountain apart from the framework of interlocking dimensions; each enclosure of the visible contributes equally to the actuality of the mountain. So, some of Jizi's paintings—by the display of utterly unique visible fields of sensuous existence—express an idea of human individuality in terms of unique sensuous existence. This differs from the functionally defined identities that Murashige points out in *Early Spring*.

As for the relation between mountain and human sensibility, Jizi's paintings emphasize human sensibility, since they often represent the element of the visible as foundational with respect to the senses. He challenges the art observer's habit of focusing upon phenomenal appearances, and he creates authentic images that give rise to an awareness of vital interiors of sensuous existence. Thus, *Infinite Land* (2009; Fig. 4.20) suggests that contact with sensuous existence can include the liveliness of wandering within a formless extensiveness or a void cleared of all experiences of phenomena. The lesson is that an image of perceptible physical forms is not required for an authentic image that gives awareness of each individual person's direct immersion in nature. The inclusion of areas of emptiness, or white fragments, in *Primeval Encounter* (2009; Fig. 4.18), *Constructive Cosmos Series—Beginning* (2009), and *The Limit of the World Series No. 1* (2010; Fig. 6.3) implies that awareness of the existence of a larger cosmos occurs in conjunction with unique wholes of sensuous existence that belong to each sensate human eyewitness.

If the *Dao of Ink Series* could ever be said to imply that the universe as a whole exists as a single principle, then the series suggests perhaps that all principles are observed—at least in part—through each living human individual who has a nature consisting of an utterly unique sensuous interior that includes the spectacle of the visible. If the cosmos—the whole that combines and unites all dimensions and relations—may be said to have an appearance, then each appearance will always occur within the context of some unique enclosure containing an interior fragment of the element the visible. It is Li Zehou who states that "the existence of everything is connected with the existence of human beings."[20] Jizi's paintings suggest that the meaning of "human being" and "humanity" cannot be separated from the awareness that one acquires by awakening to one's own unique sensuous existence.

6.5 Constructed Cosmos: *Primal Nebula No. 5* and Mondrian

With the *Nebula Series,* Jizi takes us to the macrolevel of the cosmos and the theme of material change and new beginnings. Nebulae are transformational events, where older stars explode or dwindle into clouds of gaseous matter that collapse under their own weight into new stars and attendant planetary bodies. Given the title of the series, Jizi takes the creation of new worlds as his subject. As a contemporary Chinese painter, he witnesses China's progress through massive cultural and economic changes. One question is whether he creates compositions expressing the cosmic or macrolevel dimension of change and growth, without abandoning his aim of healing the soul and affirming the uniqueness of individual human beings who wander in nature with their respective microlevels of sensuous existence. To affirm Jizi's success in preserving expression of the union of the microlevel of the unique individual with the dimensions of the larger universe, I compare two of his works—*Primal Nebula No. 3* and *Primal Nebula No. 5*—with Piet Mondrian's *Tableau I: Four Lines and Gray* (1926).

[19] *Ibid.* (pp. 350, 357, 358).

[20] Li and Cavel (2006, p. 40).

With *Primal Nebula No. 3* (Fig. 6.17), Jizi maintains the inseparability of the larger dimension of the universe from the microlevel of the unique individual. He achieves this by preserving flecks or spots of white in what might be called a "star dusting" across the whole of the image that depicts red and violet clouds in a space of darkness. Due to changes in relative size, value, and transparency, the white flecks appear as though suspended in a thickness of visible space between the viewer and cosmic event in the distance. In earlier paintings, such as *Om-ma-ni-ba-mi-hum No. 2* (2002), *Immortal Traces* (2003), and *Seething Clouds* (2009), he creates a similar dusting of white particles that gives the appearance of a fresh snowfall amid mountains. In *Primal Nebula No. 3,* the high-contrast dusting disrupts the illusion of deep recession, and there is a thickening of space suggestive of the element of the visible through which the human observer ordinarily looks at nature. Using the experimental interpretation for Jing Hao's definition of the authentic image of vital nature, we can say that in adding the white particles to the image, Jizi passes spirit through the space of the painted image as a whole, not just through the forms that resemble the astronomical phenomena. As a result, the painted image of the nebula seems more alive and resonant with the actual thickness of the visible through which a human viewer would look at such an actual cosmic event.

The composition of *Primal Nebula No. 5* (Fig. 6.18) expresses Jizi's guiding principle of unification so well that it merits close comparison with Piet Mondrian's *Tableau I: Four Lines and Gray* (1926; Fig. 6.19). Some of Jizi's paintings such as *Primeval Encounter* (Fig. 4.18) may be said to show enclosed and formless interiors of emptiness that constitute the element of the visible possessed by the individual viewer as a self-sentient being. Thus, even some images that display seemingly abstract areas can still be classified as authentic images that convey the liveliness of nature. The immediate question about *Primal Nebula No. 5* is this: How can Jizi represent the cosmos and still express the principle of unification and inseparability from sentient individuals who constitute society? How can Jizi ensure that his painting of a cosmic nebula will continue to express what Li Zehou calls the "Chinese one-world view": namely, the thesis that "the existence of everything is connected with the existence of human beings"?[21] *Primal Nebula No.* 5 (2011) is noteworthy, because careful analysis indicates that it continues to uphold the idea of enclosures of visible emptiness and sentient human individuals by the display of three areas of formlessness at three of its four corners. At the same time, this painting also represents a macrolevel and philosophical thinking about the life of the universe and its highest principles.[22]

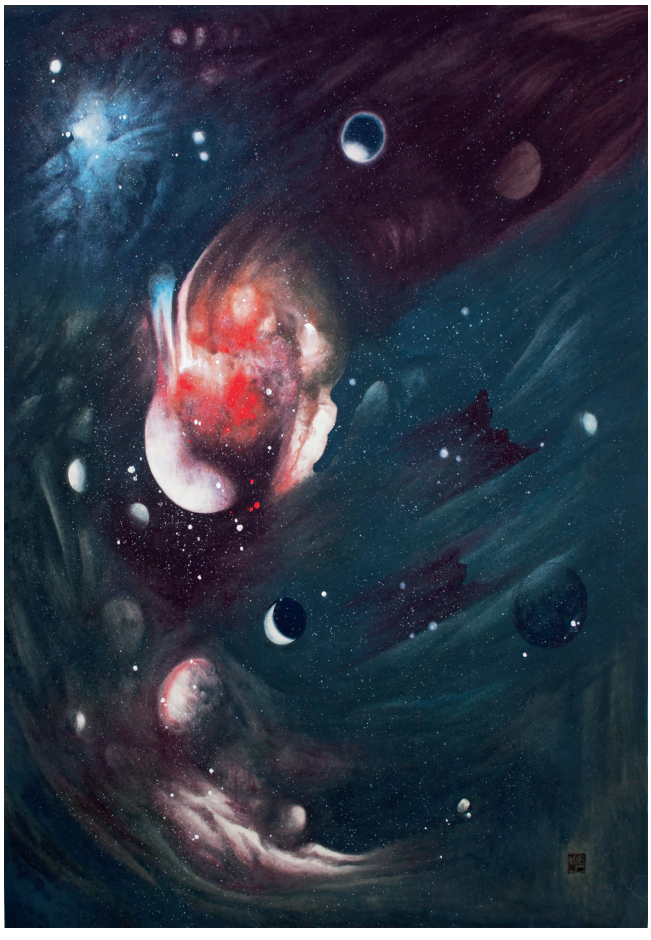


Fig. 6.17 Jizi's *Primal Nebula No. 3*, 2011. Ink and color on paper, 184 × 145 cm

This unusual painting makes for an intriguing comparison with Mondrian's diamond painting *Tableau I: Lozenge with Four Lines and Gray*. By using Meyer Schapiro's interpretation for Mondrian's diamond painting of 1926, it is possible to compare Mondrian's expression of European attitudes toward nature in the culture of the twentieth-century modernism with Jizi's expression of Chinese thinking about nature in the twenty-first century.

One of Meyer Schapiro's creative insights is that Mondrian's diamond painting presents the illusion of looking through a diamond cutout or "window" at a distant reality that exists behind the surface veil of visible appearances private to the individual human observer.[23] According to Schapiro, the visible area around the diamond of Mondrian's canvas represents the realm of appearances witnessed privately by the individual human viewer who looks upon nature. Mondrian regards this visible dimension as specific to the singular human individual and not relevant to conveying

[21] *Ibid.* (p. 40).

[22] Jizi, Reflections on Art, Numbers 40 and 47.

[23] Schapiro (1995, pp. 39–41, 53–57).



Fig. 6.18 Jizi, *Primal…No. 5*, 2011. Ink on paper, 184 × 145 cm

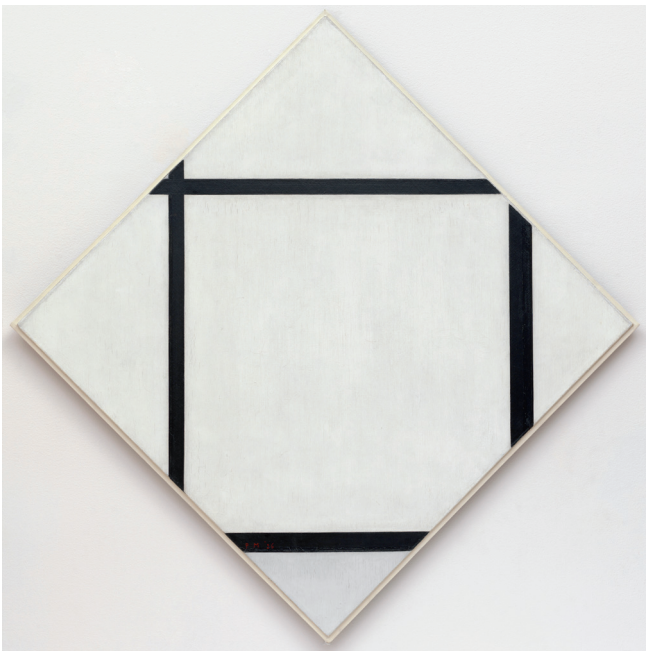


Fig. 6.19 Piet Mondrian, *Tableau I: Lozenge with Four Lines and Gray*, 1926. Oil on canvas, 113.7 × 111.8 cm

the distant reality that exists in its own right beyond subjective human experience. He states explicitly in 1920 that his aim is to express "the vital *reality of the abstract"* and what is objective, universal, and constant, as opposed to the "natural concrete" and the individual.[24] Mondrian chooses to exclude the dimension of the visible in the image area of *Tableau I: Lozenge with Four Lines and Gray.* Instead, he paints an imaginary diamond that opens directly into a dimension of the abstract and the universal. Inside this imaginary opening, the white areas are well formed by a simplified lattice of black lines that suggests an immutable structure known scientifically in terms of spatial relations.[25] Thus, the white areas internal to the diamond are not intended to convey the visible atmosphere that appears privately within the sense organ of the individual person. For Mondrian, it seems that the term "reality" applies to ordered relations of space that are entirely removed from the interior visible field of the individual person's own nature as a sentient being; any images of the interior realm of individual's sensuous existence are expunged as uninteresting. Thus, Mondrian's *Tableau I* expresses a philosophy of nature very different from what Li Zehou calls the "Chinese one-world view" where even the existence of the cosmos cannot be regarded separately from the existence of individual human beings.

How then does Jizi's composition *Primal Nebula No. 5* compare in detail with Mondrian's painting? Jizi's painting has as its central image a planetary nebula in gaseous transformation. The nebula image is framed by a diamond-shaped space created by a proscenium of three white and formless triangles at the corners. Given the analysis of *Primeval Encounter,* I suggest that we regard these three areas of intentional formlessness as markers of the element of the visible. Hence, Jizi restores to three corners of the image of *Primal Nebula No. 5* what Mondrian discards intentionally by using a diamond-shaped canvas of *Tableau I*: he leaves the private element of the visible unrepresented in his painting about the reality of the universe. The choice of a nebula as the subject for *Nebula No. 5* is also telling: Jizi's universe is one of constant change and transformation, not immutable structure. In exploring questions of the existence, being, spirit, and life of the universe, Jizi includes images of the

[24] Mondrian (1992, p. 207).

[25] Mondrian seems to guide his painting by a scientific attitude much like the one the Russell expresses a few years earlier in 1912; see Bertrand Russell, Chap. III "The Nature of Matter," *Problems of Philosophy* (Home University Library, 1912). Available from www.ditext.com/russell/russell.html. [Accessed December 11, 2014.] According to Russell's revealing remarks, the real space of science is public and expressed as knowledge of spatial relations, while the apparent space private, the percipient is of no assistance in explaining phenomena and of no interest or concern to science.



Fig. 6.20 Jizi, *Heavenly Bright* 2011. Ink and color on paper, 68 × 136 cm

connection with existing human individuals who are still included as dimensions of the life of the universe.[26]

What philosophies of self and nature do these two paintings convey? Each painter addresses questions about the greater universe or cosmos that is ordinarily invisible and beyond direct human sensuous existence. The differences are significant. Mondrian implies that the question of the being of the universe can be separated from existing human individuals who possess their respective samples of the element of the visible. This anticipates the late modern philosophy of eliminative materialism that calls for the removal all references to "self." Jizi is thoughtful for *including, at the edges,* the dimension of unique visible self-existence as the foundation for any revelations about the cosmos. He makes it plain that any interpretive construction for the cosmos must be unified with the local microlevel of the individual's sensuous existence. He keeps alive the possibility of basing an ethics and an aesthetics on the interiority of the texture of the visible. He challenges us to exercise together an awareness of the global community of sentient beings. The corners of formlessness like those in *Nebula No. 5* (Fig. 2.5) also appear *Between Sky and Earth* (2009; Fig. 2.3), a painting that suggests an eye tipped vertically in a way that aids thoughtful awareness about dimensions of an unfolding universe that Jizi calls "spirit of Dao."

During the year of work on the *Nebula Series,* Jizi returned to explore the dimension of phenomenal and planetary appearances. In the midst of expressing originating sites of cosmic energy, he created images representing evergreens on mountain sides, in *Mountains and Pines in Green* (2011) and *Green World* (2011). The message here seems to be that a representation of a personal, microlevel observation of pines on a mountain side is no less of a dimensional entryway into the wider universe than the avenue of cosmology. Also, in 2011, he worked to synthesize the categories of cosmic construction and monumental landscape. The thin and dark horizontal sliver in *Heavenly Bright World* (2011; Fig. 6.20) presents an ambiguous wavelike edge or hinge that can be the starting point for a variety of interpretations: planetary surface, phenomenal mountains, and a dark cosmic distance. Such wavelike curves are repeated in *Fleeting Clouds in Universe* (2012; Fig. 6.21), where observable vistas of natural phenomena are layered and spliced into surreal displacements with neighboring spaces. Here, too, Jizi's synthesizing of contemporary Chinese ink painting with styles of surrealism is deserving of more research: the intertwinings and disjunctures of neighboring dimensions of space in *Fleeting Clouds in Universe* (2012) calls out for comparative study with Rene Magritte's *The Blank Signature* (1965) tipped on its side.

What conclusions are suggested by this section? One lesson here is that innovations in Chinese ink wash painting can spring from use of Chinese philosophy. As Pan Tianshou (1897–1971) has said, "Philosophy is the foundation

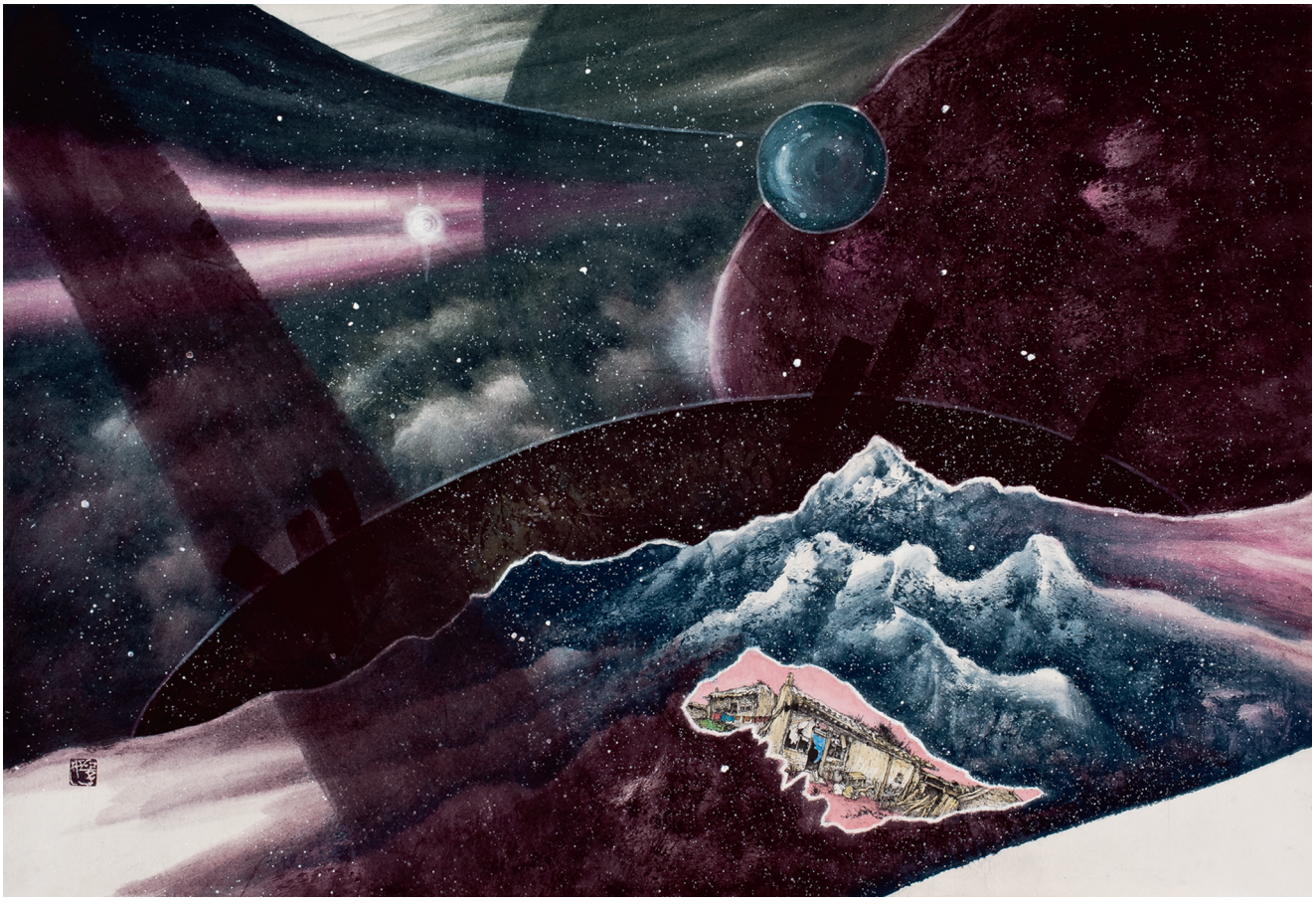
[26] Jizi, Reflections on Art, No. 21.



Fig. 6.21 Jizi, *Fleeting Clouds in Universe*, 2012. Ink and color on paper, 70 × 137 cm

of Chinese painting, and a painter must have a philosopher's head."[27] Philosophical interpretations for traditional Chinese aesthetics help to explain how Chinese artists such as Jizi contribute in vital and contemporary ways to global art. We have established that Jizi's paintings express the principle of unification of self and nature; they do answer philosophical questions. In response to the modern notion of space as a continuum of events in experience, Jizi offers an alternative: his compositions of interlocking areas such as *Primeval Encounter* imply an interior medium of formlessness possessed by the individual person that displays the patterns of phenomena that come and go. His work implies that the intimate sensuous existence of each unique human life—or the visible field that may be observed as one's own nature—is a pivotal place for awareness of a diversity of dimensions. His painting *Primal Nebula No. 5* emphasizes what Li Zehou calls "the Chinese one-world view": questions about being or existence are not separate from the sensuous existence of individual human beings. Finally, the comparison of *Primal Nebula No. 5* and *Tableau I: Lozenge with Four Lines and Gray* suggests differences between Chinese and Euro–American thinking that support the assessment that the search for Chineseness may be of interest to audiences worldwide at this historical moment.

[27] Pan Tianshou is quoted in Yu Fan, Ink Paintings: Existence and Transcendence–A Review of Jizi's Art, p. 118.



Chinese Ink Art and Global Changes

7

We began with questions about the present-day value of Chinese ink-wash painting and the relevance of traditional principles of Chinese aesthetics. The results here suggest that traditions of Chinese aesthetics and the medium of brush, ink, and paper can be used by synthesizers and interrogators to make authentic images of a field of visible emptiness that reveals the unification of self with nature, others, and a larger universe. Jizi's art shows how one may acquire a microlevel awareness of embodied union with visible life and a meditative awakening to one's own true inseparability from nature. Awareness of one's own true nature can lead one as a painter "to illuminate things," to transform them, and to make spiritual paintings about the macrolevel that manifests the spirit of the universe.[1] Thus, Jizi's artistic practice can be interpreted as a sequence of transformational steps: contemplation of external things, illumination of the internal, awareness of one's own true nature as a sentient being, and a nonrational glimpse or image of the great universe and the spirit of the whole. It is the relation between these dimensions that he expresses with his extraordinary compositions. Ultimately, his compositions suggest a principle of compassion: the existence of the larger universe cannot be separated from the utterly unique sensuous existence manifest within the senses of each individual human being.

Paintings made in this way are a means for healing the soul and contributing to social health, because they create a resonance between the spirit of the whole at the macrolevel and the local fragments that actually instantiate sentience at the microlevel. In his recent *Field of Soul Series* (2013), Jizi shows commitment to the project of healing by taking up several themes of social concern: the leveling of spirit by materialism, globalization and the disappearance of local heritage, and the "clash of civilizations" hypothesis. The paintings of this series signal that the individual person's own self-sentient awakening to unification with the universe is also the basis for a principle of benevolence toward living beings. After reviewing works from the *Field of Soul Series*, we can consider some answers for topics of interest raised earlier: contemporary Chinese ink painting and contemporaneity, the search for Chineseness, limitations in analytic philosophy that hinder expression of what Chinese ink art is about, the purpose of intentional illegibility, and the challenging claim that art history is essentially a Euro-American project. If interlocking dimensions imply complexity and authentic images of the visible field of emptiness resonate with the present, then Jizi's art may express contemporaneity. Some closing remarks outline changes that we can anticipate in our ideas about the philosophy of art, art history, and what Asian art as human expression is about. Aesthetics is not merely a Euro-American project; and Liu Yuedi is correct that noticing a difference in Asian aesthetics is necessary for appreciating the way Asian artworks embody meanings. Intentional illegibility may be regarded as a means for revealing an elemental contact with nature for which Euro-American aesthetics have no well-developed vocabulary. Similarly, if Asian aesthetics is about a preperceptual dimension of visible depth called "emptiness" that precedes and accompanies clearly conceived visual experiences of things, then there is a different awareness of what constitutes elemental space. Since artistic expressions are influenced in part by cultural interpretations of space, the history of art in Asia differs from that developed by Euro-American art historians who may be more inclined to analyze space as a three-dimensional event. It is to the topic of healing and these wider implications of this study of Jizi's art that we may now turn.

7.1 *Field of Soul Series*: Spirit of the Universe, Healing, and Social Commentary

What of the charge that spiritual paintings are mere traces of some painter's inner religious experience that do not benefit the actual needs of people? Jizi's answer is that he produces images that facilitate a viewer's awakening to the unification

[1] Jizi, Reflections on Art, Numbers 2–4.

D. A. Brubaker, C. Wang, *Jizi and His Art in Contemporary China,* Chinese Contemporary Art Series,
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of self with nature, others, and universe. Healing arises from resonance between the spirit of the whole at the macrolevel with the unique sentience of individuals at the microlevel. He tells us explicitly of his intention with his *Dao of Ink* landscape paintings: "I wanted to grasp and embody 'the spirit of the whole' from the macroscopic level."[2] The nonrational grasping of this spirit is part of what he offers to each individual person for the strengthening and care of the soul. In effect, Jizi aids in healing the soul by creating an image of the spirit of unification that surrounds the many dimensions that compose the larger universe. Resonance with this spirit of the whole emerges alongside a return to truth and "profoundly believing that all sentient beings have the Buddha nature."[3] His remarks imply that it is through realizing the value of sentient existence in one's own case that one is led to the thought of all sentient beings and the principle of compassion that circulates through the great universe. Though each of us is an utterly unique sensuous existence, it is nonetheless within the display of each interior field of uniqueness that the universe unfolds.

With his reference to the inspiration provided by Liu Xun, Jizi invites us to assess his social commitment to care for the souls of individuals caught in an age that often emphasizes material things as ends. Can his spiritual paintings qualify for inclusion in the stylistic category "social commentaries" that rounds out Jason Kuo's framework for analyzing contemporary works of Chinese ink art?[4] The difficulty of qualifying is suggested by Gao Minglu's description of Chinese maximalist painters who emerged in the early 1990s. According to Gao, the maximalist painters emphasize their own interior spiritual experience during the process of creation. These artists regard completed paintings as mere physical shells or indirect records of an inner experience or meditative awareness that is cultivated by repeating in ink the same type of stroke or mark numerous times. The art object in this context is not intended as a didactic device for leading a viewer in some preconceived aesthetic or philosophical direction. According to Gao, maximalism "cut itself off from the external world in order to gain access to meditative personal truths. It is thus an ivory tower artistic modality, a newly developing phenomenon in the contemporary Chinese art world."[5] While he grants that this emphasis on tranquil nonattachment and the removal of metaphysical narratives may be a subtle critique of market forces and skillful resistance to imposing ideological thought patterns on others, Gao asserts that "the main concern is the artists themselves, living in a rapidly changing society."[6] By contrast, Jizi's spiritual painting clearly includes a guiding narrative for the healing of others and reference to dimensions of immediate contact with life in nature. Some of his most recent works can be interpreted as cases of social commentary because they do not separate the world that manifests physical things from the field of unique sensuous existence that is noticed through meditative transformation as belonging to the observer's own true nature. Jizi does more than express a meditative thoughtlessness about things or a blankness of mind that emerges as a result of repetitive mark-making that disengages consciousness from conceiving of any perceptible objects. At least in part, his paintings are about the change in awareness that accompanies the transubstantiation of the visible from the site of commonplace material events to a personally possessed elemental field that is interior, utterly unique, undivided, and nowhere obstructed for the individual who observes it.

In keeping with his narrative of compassion, Jizi uses the *Field of Soul Series* to address themes of social concern and well-being: the leveling of spirit by materialism, globalization and of the local, the survival of tradition, and the so-called "clash of civilizations" hypothesis. The paintings of this series signal the role of human intervention for the purpose of healing rifts in contemporary life. The individual person's own awakening to inseparability from nature, sentient others, and the universe becomes the basis for acts of benevolence to aid the living. Jizi uses the device of interlocking dimensions to suggest simultaneity, presentness alongside other dimensions, the faultiness of attributing cultural identity to isolationism and the importance of sentient beings as agents for the unfolding of the universe and its spirit. Instead of emphasizing some modern vision of a future utopia, he emphasizes a contemporaneity where each individual being constitutes a dimension alongside others. The interlocking fragments of his paintings combine microimages of the most intimate local enclosures of the visible together with images of natural phenomena in displacement, rearrangement, turmoil, and silence. The *Field of Soul* series continues to express the philosophical idea of vivid interiors belonging to unique sentient individuals (Fig. 7.1): The universe is neither a cold mechanism nor merely the flux and flow of processes and events. At the same time, the long journeys between mountains of ice (Figs. 4.3, 4.21) and the long and precarious terrestrial pathways of the Great Wall (Fig. 4.4) are now augmented by narrow celestial steps for walking meditation by unique persons who cross through borders into neighboring dimensions (Fig. 7.3). There are numerous markers that human awareness and activity play a role in facilitating union and communication.

Consider for example *Limitless World No. 1* (2013) in the *Field of Soul Series*. In this painting (Fig. 7.1), the style of interlocking and multidimensional enclosures developed in the *Dao of Ink Series* of 2009 is now modified to furnish

[2] Jizi, Reflections on Art, No. 11.

[3] Jizi, Reflections on Art, No. 3.

[4] Kuo (2012, p. 27).

[5] Gao (2011, p. 350).

[6] *Ibid.* (2011, p. 350).

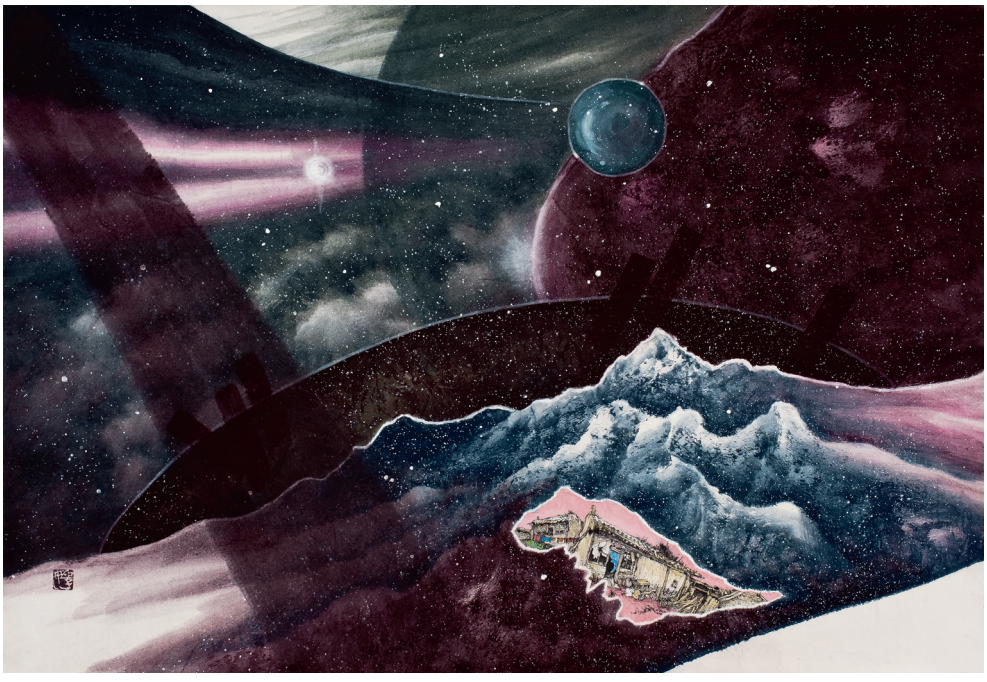


Fig. 7.1 Jizi, *Field of Soul Series—Limitless World No. 1*, 2013. Ink on paper, 83 × 121 cm

new dimensions suggestive of home, village life, and map-like geophysical boundaries. The bright pink interior of one singular fragment is the site for visual experiences of village life and phenomena of material change. The main theme is the vividness of a unifying interior place where terrestrial signs of the local and the global mingle together amid the risings and silences of other dimensions of the universe. The singular enclosed field of pink pops out immediately as an interior heart of one visible field, a most local dimension. The pink enclosure is filled with images of recognizable phenomena and belongs to the same family of icons as the bright disk of *Clean World* (Fig. 4.8) and the six enclosed areas of *Dao of Ink No. 10* (Fig. 4.15). In *Limitless World No. 1,* the bright pink field displays a line drawing that resembles dwellings in a particular hometown or village tradition. Jizi did indeed make these inscribed houses from preliminary sketches drawn from life in a village near Xuanhua. The interior image suggests traditional Chinese domestic architecture in forlorn disrepair and abandonment or else in the vividness of personal memory. Is this an image of forms belonging to a vanishing past now replaced by tower apartments or new brick? The pink interior may be read as expressing the interior life of a person who is experiencing the pressures that accompany rapid material changes and improvements. Or perhaps the image is a reminder that there are always living roots of local heritage that sustain each contemporary Chinese artist who creates global art. Within *Limitless World No. 2* (Fig. 7.2), a similar enclosed field of pink appears to ride serenely as a placeholder within the flow of all the dimensions of the universe. In both, the field of pink is an intersection where the local, regional, and global combine in one unique place: it may be interpreted as an emblem for the first-dimensional depth of visible space that Merleau-Ponty describes as a "…global 'locality'" that precedes measurement and the perception of relationships between forms.[7] The global and the cosmic are in mutual complementarity with the local and the unique.

The message of healing and compassion is more explicit in *Boundless Sky* (2013) (Fig. 7.3). This painting adds the theme of journeys and human intervention into a web of interlocking areas that are reminiscent of both *Dialogue with Dao 6* (Fig. 4.12) and *Dao of Ink No. 13* (Fig. 4.17). There are two elongated and internally amorphous fragments (red–violet to the left and orange–brown to the right) sandwiched between three vertical spaces that depict the deep distance of the great universe. These two fragments have relatively formless interiors that recall the ink-wash studies of Jizi's *Meditation Series* of the preceding year; hence, as one might expect, they do not exhibit interior textures that bear a resemblance to phenomenal mountains, snow, or ice. Between these more meditative interiors, we see the crisp planetary surfaces of worlds in living color and deep distance. One notable difference with *Dialogue with Dao 6* is that the borders between dimensions are now torn, jagged, zigzagged, or thorny. There is a suggestion of friction, self-protection, pent-up energy, and perhaps even graphic representations of rhythmic heart beats. Across this jaggedness are placed dark, semitransparent rectangular shapes suggestive of bridges, bandages, stitches, or patches. These unifying patches imply communication and travel between neighboring dimensions;

[7] Merleau-Ponty (1993, p. 140).



Fig. 7.2 Jizi, *Field of Soul Series—Limitless World No. 2*, 2013. Ink and color on paper, 83 × 121 cm



Fig. 7.3 Jizi, *Field of Soul Series—Boundless Sky*, 2013. Ink and color on paper, 121 × 83 cm

and they stem from paintings of the earlier *Informal Ink Series*, since *No. 2* (Fig. 7.4) contains an opaque rectangle imprinted with characters from Jizi's personally carved seals, and since *No. 3* (Fig. 7.5) displays a dark rectangular swath that is vertical and veil-like. Because Jizi associates rectangular patches in this way with seals, imprinted characters, and language, the dark transparency of the rectangles in *No. 3* and *Boundless Sky* suggest contemplation. Both *No. 2* and *No. 3* experiment with ascending–descending stairways of the sort noticeable to the right and then low in the center of *Boundless Sky*. Moreover, both *No. 2* and *No. 3* exhibit a disk containing a watery atmosphere similar to compositions of the intervening *Meditation Series* (2011) and to the two amorphous gateway fragments of *Boundless Sky* (Fig. 7.3).

What makes *Boundless Sky* an artwork relevant to the needs of living persons? The dark rectangular patches are like sutures placed across the jazzed boundaries. This creates a metaphor for the practice of healing. It is as if the painting displays examples of intervention that preserve connection and mutuality between dimensions. The rectangles suggest an analogy to *shunts* installed by human intervention; they are devices applied so that consciousness develops new paths of less resistance for coordination with other interiors. Thus, the patches or stitches help to mend the jagged boundaries between the neighboring dimensions that might, otherwise, seem separate and incommensurate. This reading works well if one agrees to read the red–violet and yellow–brown enclosures as dimensions of meditation situated alongside neighboring areas filled with changing phenomena and active planetary life. The theme becomes one of putting into practice an attitude with regard to the immediacy of life:



Fig. 7.4 Jizi, *Informal Ink Series No. 2,* 2010. Ink on paper, 195 × 185 cm



Fig. 7.5 Jizi, *Informal Ink Series No. 2,* 2010. Ink on paper, 195 × 185 cm

enlightenment is channeled and stitched to the site of significant planetary events. Well-being requires thinking and implementation of the awareness of union, not keeping the mind blank. The companion piece in black and white wash, *Infinite Being* (2013; Fig. 7.6), adds an interesting note: One fragment suggests that it is possible to journey within one interior from formlessness, to mountain-like appearances and finally to communion with the cosmos. *Flying Clouds* (Fig. 7.7) also exhibits such rectangular stitches; hence, it suggests a similar attempt to heal by joining different dimensions belonging to the wider universe.

The themes of cultural pluralism and rejection of the so-called "clash of civilizations" hypothesis are present in *Limitless World No. 4* (Fig. 7.8), another member of the *Field of Soul Series*. The emphasis is on the inseparability and mutuality of interlocking dimensions that differ. At the upper left, there is a crisp blue region of ice and snow with a community of tiny houses, a Tibetan-style monastery and a stupa. This region is firmly interlocked with a second dimension of opaque colors and semitransparent swaths of black ink. The suggestion here is of two different attitudes of cultural thinking and practice. It might be argued that this represents China today where the attitude of tradition and heritage is interlocked with the attitude of reform, new technologies, and habits of consumption arising from economic growth and global participation. The image of interlocking tongue-and-groove joinery in this painting creates an interesting indirect reference to Ai Weiwei's *Map of China* (2006) made out of wood obtained from dismantled temples of the Qing Dynasty. Maxwell Hearn reads *Map* persuasively as "a symbol of China's cultural and ethnic diversity" where something united is at the same time "a fusion of countless individuals."[8] For Hearn, Ai Weiwei invites us to consider how such complexity arose and whether it can be maintained. In a similar way, we can say that Jizi's use of tongue-and-groove shapes invites us to ask how difference and union can be affirmed simultaneously. In this interlocking of two fields, there is a suggestion of pressure: One shape reminiscent of the bright island of pink in *Limitless World No. 2* is now dulled and filled with artificial stripes of an impersonal repetition. Alternatively, the opposition in *Limitless Word No. 4* between the light-blue region and the opaque-violet territory may be read in terms of two great civilizations or spirits that are different and yet historically shaped so that they are insepa-

[8] Hearn (2013, p. 166).



Fig. 7.6 Jizi, Informal Ink Series No. 3, 2010. Ink on paper, 195 × 185 cm



Fig. 7.7 Jizi, *Field of Soul Series—Flying Clouds*, 2013. Ink and color on paper, 121 × 83 cm

rable. In that case, Jizi's composition upholds cultural difference without disconnection and isolation; hence, the painting implies a rejection of the "clash of civilizations" interpretation of globalization that generally relies on the false premise that cultures develop in isolation from each other and without common interests.

The thesis of difference and compatibility is also suggested in *Limitless World No. 3* (Fig. 7.9), another painting in the *Field of Soul* series, where two attitudes or cultures unfold together as if they were different sections of one flowering peony. Jizi conveys perhaps a glimpse of the spirit of the whole of the larger universe with *Heavens* (2013) (Fig. 7.10). To find such vivid pictorial representations of forces of soul and spirit at work throughout the universe and its dimensions, one needs to revisit Kandinsky. Yu Fan makes the insightful observation that there is a musical flow to some of Kandinsky's paintings that may inspire Jizi.[9] As with Kandinsky, there is also an effort to bridge the microlevel of the terrestrial and embodied individual with the spirit of some macrolevel. But Kandinsky does not seem to experiment as Jizi does with interiors of formlessness and interlocking dimensions that go beyond twentieth century avant-garde conventions for representing space.

Given the multiplicity of dimensions and styles in Jizi's painting, one may conclude that he breaks free from old oppositions such as the polarization that pits tradition against the modern. This raises the question of whether Jizi's art qualifies for membership in the subcategories of unrestricted and diversified ink wash that Ji Shaofeng uses to classify ink-wash painting as contemporary. It is a challenge to insist that Jizi qualifies for the first subcategory: "new urban experience." But if "new urban experience" means an aesthetic response to experiences of urbanization that calls for spiritual awareness and union with nature, then perhaps his paintings qualify. It is also the case that *Limitless World No. 1* (Fig. 7.1) with its pink interior inscribed with the architecture of traditional dwellings connects with the themes of memory, the fate of streets, vanishing history, and cultural tradition that belong to the work of contemporary Chinese artists in Beijing, such as Rong Rong and Zhang Dali. Jizi does satisfy fully another category that belongs to Ji Shaofeng's definition of contemporary ink-wash painting:

[9] Yu Fan, Ink Paintings: Existence and Transcendence—A Review of Jizi's Art," p. 116.

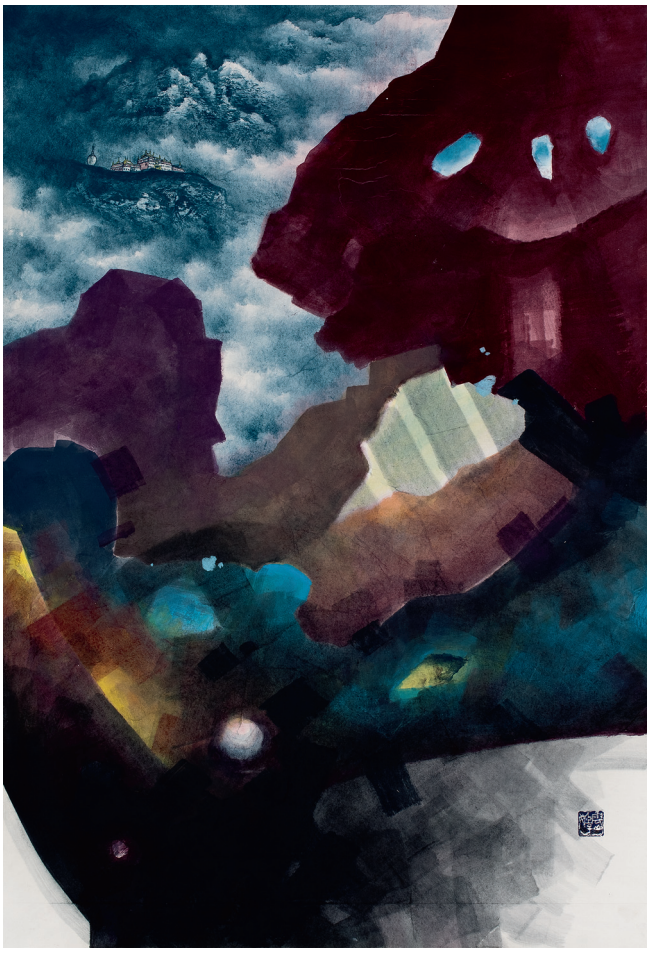


Fig. 7.8 Jizi, *Field of Soul Series—Limitless World No. 4*, 2013. Ink and color on paper, 121 × 83 cm



Fig. 7.9 Jizi, *Field of Soul Series—Limitless World No. 3*, 2013. Ink and color on paper, 121 × 83 cm

Fig. 7.10 Jizi, *Field of Soul Series—Heavens*, 2013. Ink and color on paper, 83 × 121 cm



inquiry into "the current social life and the individual's survival situation" in a way that embodies humanistic concern.[10] This surely applies to Jizi's stated intention of following Liu Xun's path and addressing the health of the soul. Given the healing patches in the works of the *Field of Soul Series,* Jizi does suggest that awareness of a union with nature and others reduces harm to the environment and promotes a sense of inseparability that aids well-being.

7.2 Chinese Aesthetics: Globalizing the Difference

Our results confirm Liu Yuedi's suggestion that the search for Chineseness is not a revival of the past so much as a development of new interpretations for portions of traditional Chinese aesthetics. They also support the claim that the search for Chineseness is not a mere reversal where the margins become a new center that begins to marginalize others; for Chineseness can include an advocacy of traditional principles of aesthetics and an authenticity in representing nature that can be freely appreciated by audiences abroad. Experimental use of Merleau-Ponty's term "the visible" may give Euro-American audiences enough of a meaningful vocabulary, so they can participate in a more global appreciation of the principle called "substance" (*zhi*) contained in an image that is authentic according to traditional Chinese aesthetics.

To the extent that the word "Chineseness" implies aesthetic practices mentioned in traditional Chinese philosophy, Chinese artists have available guiding principles for the creation of artistic styles that may make some modern works of art seem historical or characteristic of a passing period. Contemporary Chinese artworks that explore Chineseness cannot be treated simply as new contributions to an already established avant-garde tradition in Euro-American art. Art discourses of the modern European avant-garde will be placed into geographical perspective; they will be regarded not as sovereign but instead as complementary to a system of art interpretation based on contemporary investigations of Chineseness and creative accounts of Chinese aesthetics. Some forms of art deemed modern in Euro-American locales may appear conservative or conventional when considered in relation to artworks and philosophies of art that are emerging in China.

Earlier during a consideration of the trend toward what is called "Chinesesness," we examined Liu Yuedi's doubts about the ability of Euro-American philosophies to provide an aesthetics adequate for explaining the value and aboutness of contemporary Chinese artworks. Taking a closer look now at Kant's modern philosophy and Arthur Danto's analytic philosophy of art, it is clear that Liu's reservations and concerns are compelling. Yu Fan gives a succinct characterization of modern European philosophy that points to one of its possible limitations: "modern philosophy is epistemological research" and "an epistemological system founded on sensory empiricism" that takes as its purpose "the exact knowledge of what we believe is knowable in the world."[11] The question is whether the emphasis by Euro-American philosophers of art on the expression of knowledge makes them unable to explain the way that many Chinese artworks embody meaning. When the topic is the interpretation of Asian and specifically Chinese painting, it seems clear that some Euro-American philosophies of art are inadequate.

The limitation that comes from the emphasis upon knowledge can be noticed in Immanuel Kant's philosophy. For Kant, reason learns only from nature what it has itself put into nature, and nature is compelled to reveal only lessons about appearances in experience. He writes that lessons from nature are nothing more than the understandable experiences of objects or events that reason as judge chooses to extract from the realm of sense. [12] Hence, Kant's philosophy of contact with nature begins at the level of developed experiences of sense objects. This makes it impossible for him to articulate the idea in the tradition of Chinese aesthetics that *xiang* (image) includes the display of a sensuous norm or observable field that is deeper than appearances. One would think today that nature also teaches by showing each of us singly and uniquely a visible field that *precedes* conjunction with concepts and the emergence of visual experiences of things. But Kant takes no interest in describing this. His modern European philosophy begins with the objects that perception discriminates, not the realm of sense before it mixes with concepts and forms of thought that provide understanding. It is precisely this modern thinking—still evident in some Euro-American philosophies today—that is challenged by the counterinstance of the field of the visible that is possessed as an interiority and witnessed only in one's own case. To the extent that our new interpretive language for the authentic image coheres with the lessons in *Bi fa ji,* we can say that the painter-sage instructs the visitor to grasp an observable field called "substance" that has no name in Kant's philosophy. Jizi weaves images representing this counterinstance into his compositions during the creation of his *Dao of Ink Series*.

These results suggest that it is legitimate to question the adequacy of Arthur Danto's analytic philosophy of art. Turning to Danto's definition of art, we can begin to articulate a hypothesis that explains the problem. Danto's definition of art—marked by the double criteria of meaning and embodi-

[10] Ji (2012, p. 38).

[11] Yu Fan, Ink Paintings: Existence and Transcendence—A Review of Jizi's Art," p. 119.

[12] Kant (1929, p. 20).

ment—is itself theory-laden in a way that prevents it from conveying the meaning of Chinese artworks that are about a field of embodiment designated by "visible" and by the term "substance" (*zhi*). The limitation of Danto's approach is revealed in *What Art Is* where he restates his definition of art as embodied meaning: "something is a work of art when it has a meaning—is about something—and when the meaning is embodied in the work—which usually means: is embodied in the object in which the work of art materially consists."[13] The important phrase here that signals restriction is "materially consists." Danto states that his aim with the double criteria is to "bring to art a connection with cognizance: to what is possible, and to the faithful, to the actual."[14] Yet, in his influential *Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, he suggests that actual art is embodied narrowly in "mere real things" and "material counterparts."[15] So, when Danto claims that art images have a semantic function similar to words, and when he adds his notion of "aboutness" to explain how art connects with the actual for the purpose transfiguring the commonplace, he is describing a change in cognitive interpretations within the stable dimension of real things and physical counterparts. In this regard, Danto's account of art moves close to the cognitive theory of art developed by Nelson Goodman who claims that the value of art is to be judged by "how well it serves the cognitive purpose" and that "aesthetic experience is cognitive experience."[16]

By contrast, given our provisional use of "visible field" to interpret the Chinese aesthetic principle of the authentic image, the element of the visible that takes the role of *zhi* (substance) in an authentic image is never embodied as a material object. If substance in the authentic image is embodied as a material object, then authenticity would be lost and the image would turn instead merely into a case of resemblance or reference to things. The point is that actuality of nature is revealed as the field of the visible directly witnessed as a first dimension of depth; and this field is neither the subjectivity of mere thinking nor an object of experience. According to our experimental interpretation of the traditional Chinese aesthetic principle of the authentic image, both "the visible" and "substance" refer to an immediate sensuous field that is constitutive both of the human seer and of external things seen. By interpreting Jizi's paintings in a way that substitutes the term "visible" for "substance" in the lesson of the sage of the Stone Drum Cliff, the individual art observer comes to think of Chinese painting as about an embodied contact with nature that is impossible to conceptualize in terms of an understanding or a visual perception of real material things. It follows that some Chinese artworks embody meanings about a transfiguration of embodiment—a change from one phase for interpreting the body to a second phase—that cannot be described by an analytic philosophy of art that is ordinarily restricted to the first phase for interpreting embodiment that refers to objects and material conditions.

According to our experimental interpretation for the authentic image in Chinese aesthetics, the authentic image is one in which the painter passes or embeds spirit within the extensive field of the visible that is not to be experienced in a commonplace (late-modern) empirical way as an understandable thing. The provisional suggestion is this: Chinese aesthetics describes authentic paintings of nature as representing a manifest field of the visible that cannot be equated with human experiences of real things understood as objects, events, or processes. To abandon the Chinese practice of making images that convey the element of constitutive emptiness (or the field of the visible that animates personal observations of nature) is to abandon a specific cultural awareness of the liveliness of nature and actuality of life. If we adhere exclusively to Danto's analytical philosophy of art, we will be left without the interpretation needed to notice how a painting displays an image of substance in the painter-sage's sense; hence, the resonance of the image with the vitality of nature will go unnoticed and unmentioned. If Danto's account is ever to accommodate the awareness expressed in Chinese aesthetics of what an authentic image is about, and if it is ever to explain the aboutness of Jizi's fields of visible emptiness in *Primeval Encounter* (Fig. 4.18), then it will be necessary to give up the claim that in aesthetics it is acceptable to be an idealist about art and a materialist with respect to embodiment and things. In the end, Liu Yuedi's case seems strong: There is a difference between Euro-American and Chinese aesthetics that must be taken into account so that Chinese art can be interpreted as about Chinese indigenous cultural traditions. It seems that analytic philosophy of art currently depends on a materialist philosophy of nature that may also cause individuals in Euro-American cultures to turn a blind eye to artworks that manifest the element of the visible. When a definition of art includes the stipulation that embodiment is ordinarily in a material object or physical event, then one interpretation of embodiment has already been entrenched as a preferred part of the essence of art. As a result, equal consideration is not given to Asian traditional contexts that treat embodiment in terms of individual sensuous existence that is an utterly unique field of emptiness (i.e., the innate field of the visible).

The value of *Bi fa ji* is that it motivates us to break away from late-modern language and to consider *Primeval Encounter* as an authentic image where each of the four interior areas of white formlessness represents an instance of the field of the visible in which the spirit of an individual person inheres. Without this interpretation, even specialists may

[13] Danto (2013, p. 149).

[14] *Ibid.* (pp. 154–155).

[15] Danto (1981, pp. 78, 79–80, 81–82, 104).

[16] Goodman (1968, pp. 258, 262).

resort to classifying Chinese literati paintings merely according to cannons of brushwork or subject matter. Without it, art critics from other cultures or periods may be tempted to attribute Jizi's experimentation with the areas of white formlessness entirely to the influence of modern Euro-American abstract painting. In the absence of it, scholars may attribute Chinese resistance to European artistic standards of "naturalism," such as resemblance or reference to physical reality, as mere conformity to orthodoxy.[17] But with it, it is possible to explain the resistance of Chinese painters of the late Ming and early Qing to what James Cahill calls "naturalism": their resistance springs from deep philosophical disagreement over what constitutes an authentic image of the vitality of actual life in visible nature.

The importance that Chinese painters place upon philosophy is evident in their remarks. By comparison, consider Arthur Danto's claim that "philosophical writing on art encourages, and encourages when it is best and most exemplary, the view that the philosophy of art is *deeply* irrelevant to the life of art, that nothing much worth knowing can be gleaned from those dry and eviscerated analyses." [18] Danto may perhaps be correct about analytic philosophy of art but not about the relation of Chinese aesthetics with the life of art. One conclusion here, therefore, is that the tradition of Chinese aesthetics points to a radical transformation of the commonplace habit of regarding the actuality of nature as a collection of mere real things in human experience. The more each of us notices—and ceases to be blinded to—the *differences* between Chinese aesthetics and Euro-American philosophies of art, such as Kant's aesthetics and more recent analytic philosophies of art, the greater the benefit to artists, global art, and art audiences across the world. Jizi's paintings help support the conclusion that "re-Chineseness" is a step to a "neo-Chineseness" that is not just for the sake of China.[19] The globalization of Chinese aesthetics is a chance to create a dialogue about the uniqueness of our respective contacts in the present with each other and with nature.

7.3 Intentional Authentic Illegibility and Anti-Writing

Given that some of Jizi's paintings qualify as both authentic images and cases of intentional illegibility, we can apply the same interpretation for authenticity to cases of illegibility and anti-writing created by other interrogators and consider the fit. The account of an image that is authentic according to the principles of Chinese aesthetics may be applied experimentally across different mediums, materials, and subject matter in an effort to assess whether a given artwork or design is authentically Chinese. Earlier we made note of Alexandra Munroe's call for such an aesthetic and her estimation of the benefits to be gained by using some principle of ink art aesthetics to expresses commonalities between classic Chinese ink-wash paintings and contemporary artworks such as Xu Bing's *Book from the Sky* (Fig. 2.2) and his computer generated imagery. We are in a position now to test whether the experimental interpretation for authentic images that resonate with the vitality of nature can be applied more generally in interesting ways to artists other than Jizi. The purpose of this is to assess whether other contemporary Chinese artists may be said to create compositions, environments, or design spaces that express the unification of the individual person's utterly unique sensuous existence with visible nature.

It is clear now that paintings such as *Primeval Encounter* (Fig. 4.18) include images of an interior emptiness that can be read as representing a formless element of the visible that unifies the individual person with the vitality and actuality of nature. Jizi's paintings of this sort are interrogations of intentional illegibility that satisfy the second definition of "anti-writing" outlined by Wu Hung. *Primal Encounter* subverts experiences of recognizable patterns and shapes by means of four subsections that become images of four unique instances of visible emptiness where not even form is left as a signifier of meaning. This lends support to the thesis that anti-writing can be used experimentally to make the philosophical point that an image can display something of value that resists expression in conventional literary systems of discourse that limit meaningful content to the signification of cognizable forms, things or events.

Can the definition for "authenticity," developed to assess Jizi's success, be applied more generally as an aesthetic principle that helps us consider the Chineseness of Xu Bing's two works, *Book from the Sky* and *Landscript?* Xu Bing says that Chinese philosophy is "a tonic" for contemporary art: "My works are distinctly Chinese, in terms of their way of thinking, in terms of their production, and particularly in terms of the way they communicate with viewers—communicating by refusing to communicate."[20] In its premier in 1988, with the original title *Mirror to Analyze the World: The Century's Final Volume*, Xu Bing's installation was condemned by official critics as an attack on classical Chinese culture. However, it is clear that each art viewer who inspects this environment of fake characters is left looking at a presentness of space that is beyond familiar linguistic determinations and also between the bellows composed of a heavenly block-printed "sky" and books belonging to the

[17] Cahill (1981, pp. 68–69).

[18] Danto (1981, pp. 55–56).

[19] Liu Yuedi, "Chinese Contemporary Art: From De-Chineseness to Re-Chineseness," p. 74.

[20] Xu (2009, p. 121).

"earth" below (Figs. 2.2, 4.33). Hence, this installation refers indirectly to lines of Chinese philosophy in such chapters as 5 and 14 of the *Daodejing*.[21] However, the main question is if the interpretation of "authenticity" (*zhen*), in terms of resonance with a sensuous norm denoted by the signifiers "substance" (*zhi*) and "field of the visible," can be used to assess whether *Book from the Sky* represents the unification of self, nature, or universe. Does the experimental interpretation fit the art? One may argue that it does. As Xu Bing puts it, everyone is equal when faced with this book, regardless of education or cultural background, for nobody can obtain any understanding from it. It follows that the installation brings each visitor who examines the pseudo-characters face to face (at the microlevel) with an immediacy of a visible space that defies any attempt to classify it according to human experiences or a rational understanding of objects of knowledge. Thus, *Book from the Sky* is a heavenly book that helps the individual person to manifest the liveliness of the visible that gives contact with the actuality of nature and that borders on other dimensions belonging to a larger universe at the macrolevel. In short, it emphasizes the relationships between the individual observer, visible nature, and universe.

The ink painting *Landscript* (Fig. 4.34) is especially intriguing, because it qualifies even more clearly as a case of playful anti-writing of the second sort even though it utilizes many genuine characters that do belong to the Chinese language system. This painting is undeniably an image created by a painter who includes an unlabeled dimension of a diffuse and formless visible hollow that weaves into and between the brush strokes of the recognizable characters that compose the vista of the natural landscape. Thus, one might propose the hypothesis that *Landscript* is a lively expression of Chinese painting heritage, because it contains an image that gives a special contemporary emphasis to a constitutive emptiness, or to the substance (*zhi*) needed for resonance with nature and that is inseparable from a person's direct witnessing of visible life.

7.4 Forging New Art Histories and Avant-Gardes

When contemporary Chinese ink artists extract the principle of the authentic image from Jing Hao's traditional aesthetics, they contribute to a history of art that is not merely a Euro-American project. Our results suggest that even the best example of an image made by the method of scientific modeling to resemble the forms of physical things will fail to qualify as an authentic image and representation of the liveliness of visible nature that animates one's own life. It is no longer possible to use such terms as "real appearance" and "the real, physical world" as though resemblance or reference to these were the only ultimate and universally accepted standard for assessing the authenticity of a representation of nature.[22]

James Elkins may be correct that there is a particular kind of space related to an analysis of representations that is characteristically Euro-American. Yet, Elkins states that space is "so specifically a concern of Western twentieth-century art history and criticism that I hesitate to see Chinese painting from its perspective."[23] Our study suggests that space cannot be thoroughly reduced to any conventional analysis of representations favored by the traditions of Euro-American cultures. With assistance from radical language developed by Merleau-Ponty, we may begin to say that Chinese painting produces a transubstantiation of the visible where a first dimension of space is observed as a unique field of visible emptiness that the eyewitness calls "mine." It is this space—not the objective space of perceived volume, object-hood, and surface planes in relative positions—that gives a viewer awareness of the vitality of nature. Merleau-Ponty provides useful terms so that persons belonging to indigenous cultures outside of China may be able to access an idea of the substantial field of emptiness (or the visible) that traditional Chinese ink paintings and contemporary paintings, such as Jizi's, do seem to be about. In reply to Elkins, one can say that there is an available depth or space witnessed privately by each human being who sees, and this first dimension of space differs from the space of three-dimensions that is the product often explored by Euro-American art historians. If the creative interpretation of "substance" (*zhi*) in terms of "the visible" holds up, then we can expect contemporary Chinese artists to make "authentic" (i.e., vivid, alive) images or designs that feature the space of an utterly unique sensuous existence that has no name as yet in the traditions of Euro-American art history and philosophy. Again, Elkins suggests that "only the West possesses a critical tradition that centers on the analysis of space."[24] But the investigation of Jizi's ink paintings shows that there is a noticeable difference in space that is articulated in Asian and Chinese art. The project of an Asian art history remains relevant to audiences worldwide, since Asian art history will be about an extensive field of the visible that is available to individuals in Euro-American audiences as well. Although it is already available to individuals, thought about it is recessive or suppressed in the official cultural practices that have led to the emergence of modern and late-modern European traditions.

[21] For a consideration of *Daodejing* 5 and 14, see Ames and Hall (2003, p. 84).

[22] Cahill (1981, pp. 67, 69).

[23] Elkins (2010, p. 42).

[24] *Ibid.* (p. 41).



Fig. 7.11 Jizi, *Soul World Trek*, 2013. Ink on paper, 125.5 × 245.5 cm

Jing Hao's text is a reminder from history about the witnessing of the liveliness of nature that awaits stronger expression by present-day artists and philosophers. Thus, art historians should expect Chinese artists and others to make art about the vitality of nature that conveys, to global audiences, new cultural paradigms for interpreting "space," "self," "nature," and "true image."

Merleau-Ponty helps us answer the puzzle of how artworks that express a space that is distinctly Chinese can be appreciated by persons indigenous to regions outside China. Lu Hong affirms the compatibility of difference and commonality when he describes the aim of contemporary Chinese artists as that of "showing their national identity, originality, and the differentiation of contemporary Chinese art under globalization, which stresses plurality, tolerance, and equality."[25] Surely, Lu Hong is correct: A vibrant and just global community does not require its members to abandon their own local and indigenous cultures. Still, one wonders how individuals in non-Chinese cultures can appreciate the idea of authenticity and the contact with nature described in Chinese aesthetics that may guide contemporary Chinese artists in making contributions to global art. In answering this question, the language that David Hall and Roger Ames offer concerning culturally "dominant" thinking and culturally "recessive" thinking is a helpful starting point.[26] Contemporary Chinese artworks can express a philosophy of nature that is specifically Chinese or manifested continuously in Chinese painting heritage. At the same time, any art observer, inside China or out, possess an utterly unique instance of the field of the visible that is available for resonance with images of Chinese ink art that qualify as authentic in Jing Hao's technical sense. So, even if the artistic practice of symbolizing space as the first dimension of the visible is recessive in Euro-American cultures, it remains the case that each living art observer in any Euro-American culture possesses an instance of such a visible field and should, in principle with the right interpretations and encouragement, be able to take notice of it. Thinking about an instance of the field of the visible and its implications is still often recessive in official institutions of Euro-American culture today. Nonetheless, the art observer new to contemporary Chinese art does already possess an interior field of the visible and the basis for developing an awareness of the immediacy of life in nature.

We can expect meanings for "abstraction," "nonobjective" and "avant-garde" to become more particular and culturally specific. Some modernists may define "abstract art" or "nonobjective art" in terms of the subversion of realistic representations that offers the alternative of object-hood or the materiality of the picture plane. On such a modernist aesthetics, "nonobjective" painting may be taken to mean nonrepresentational painting that exemplifies physical existence. However, such a modernist account is still dependent upon a philosophy that defines nature in terms of experiences of material things, events, and processes. It is precisely this identification of existence with three-dimensionality and the physical that Jizi subverts when he absorbs aspects of modern abstraction and then creates powerful enclosures of visible emptiness. The meanings of

[25] Lu (2012, p. 22).

[26] Hall and Ames (1995, p. xiii).

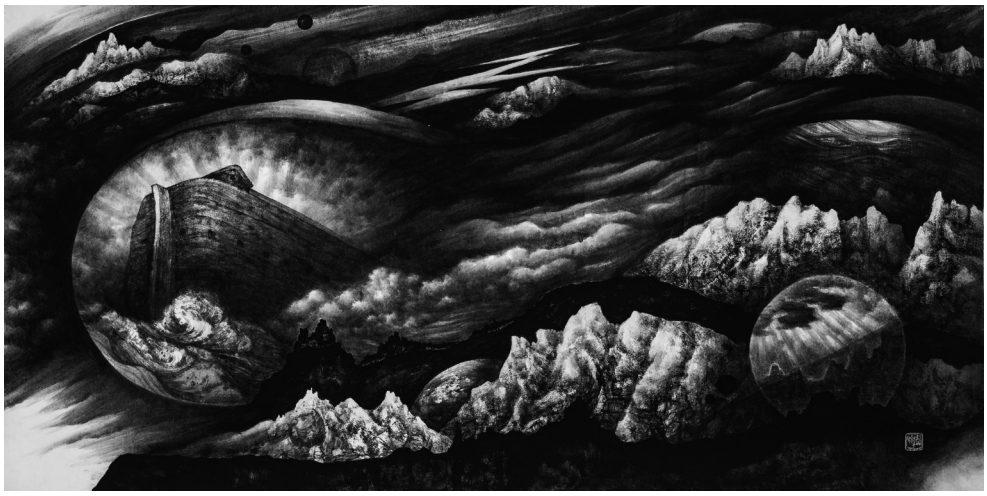


Fig. 7.12 Jizi, *Arc From Heaven*, 2013. Ink on paper, 124 × 249 cm

such terms as "nonobjective" and "actual existence" will change, as works by Chinese artists help equip global audiences with new cultural paradigms for interpreting self, nature, and authentic images that are true to the vitality of nature. It will be impossible to equate actuality with experiences of material embodiment alone for the actuality of nature is animated for the living person by a unique instantiation of the field of the visible that cannot be perceptually conceived as a visual object. Ideas of the avant-garde will be scrambled and reversed, as the content of particular artworks—from modern Europe or the Song dynasty—are transfigured by art observers who work with new interpretations for the authentic image in Chinese aesthetics.

In closing, it is important to note that Jizi connects his artistic inspiration with a sense of unification acquired from a glimpse of the spirit of the Dao that circulates in the great universe. At the same time, his paintings are both about moments of arrival at tranquility and also about the continuing struggle of applying wisdom in actual practice on difficult pathways of life. His *Soul World Trek* (2013; Fig. 7.11) is a reminder that the journey of souls is always a work in progress, as each of us experiment with the difficult practice of living compassionately and inescapably with others. This painting takes stock of the challenges always faced by meandering souls that are shaped by various pressures, achievements, obstacles, and temptations of the current period. It suggests a survey of the environment and surroundings of individuals who shape themselves and their neighbors by choices and actions. The sense of choice, challenge and anticipation bring to mind Hieronymus Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1504). If *Soul World Trek* is a barometer of the challenges faced by souls, then *Ark From Heaven* (2013) (Fig. 7.12) seems to suggest that the fluid and heavenly atmosphere of a macroscopic dimension continues to circulate a spirit of unity and compassion. The existence of this ark of enlightenment is inseparable from all those who actually manifest the unification of self, nature, and others in an unfolding universe. It offers wisdom amid floods and carries through the universe the compassion that is manifested in practice only through the determined efforts of sentient beings.



Fig. 7.13 Jizi, *Re-flying to the Sky*, 2013. Ink and color on paper, 184.5 × 145 cm

Two additional paintings seem to convey Jizi's own thinking about his perseverance, progress, and commitment to the tradition of ink-wash painting: These are *Re-Flying to the Sky* (2013) and *Dimension of Ages* (2013). In the first painting (Fig. 7.13), we find that Jizi has made progress along



Fig. 7.14 Jizi, *Dimension of Ages* 2013. Ink and color on paper, 183.5 × 144.5 cm

the meandering pathways that lead toward spiritual mooring during journeys across the earth. Though the path is steeper, the point of view is now far above the level plains shown in *The Place That Is Nearest the Sky* (2009; Fig. 4.21). The ice and snow lie mostly below and the climate is warmer if we are to judge from the pinnacle of the mountain in the near distance that is in the auspicious configuration of a sage or bodhisattva. In the three sections that compose *Dimension of Ages* (2013; Fig. 7.14), Jizi's continuing journey of steep ascent in the center is flanked by two landscapes. The theme is one of continuing ascent toward a spiritual homeland and supporting influences on each side from Chinese painting heritage. To the upper right, there is a landscape of tall and austere mountains that refer unmistakably to the beginnings of the tradition of Chinese-style landscape painting (Fig. 5.1) and the flowering of landscape painting during the Northern Song dynasty. The topmost tufts of dark, patchy foliage are reminiscent of the summits in Fan Kwan's (d. after 1023) *Travelers Amid Streams and Mountains* (eleventh century), and the lithe and folding texture of the mountains recalls the guard-tower peak at the far left in Guo Xi's (c. 1020–c. 1090) *Early Spring* (1072) (Fig. 6.16). The effects of light and dark suggest perhaps an homage to the extraordinary drama in the landscapes of Gong Xian (1617–1689). With regard to the flanking section at the lower right, Jizi uses ink blots and brushwork to pay homage to Shitao (1642–1707) and his *10000 Ugly Ink Blots* (1685). Finally, the central panel in blue ink reiterates the longstanding themes of icy snow

mountains and the meanderings of a tiny Great Wall that continues to keep pace with the steep ascent. Although he continues on a path of strenuous ascent in contemporary life, Jizi is well accompanied by earlier painters who constitute part of the great tradition of Chinese landscape painting.

This investigation develops some of the many avenues that Jizi's paintings and writings offer for consideration. It emphasizes some features among many others that are equally worthy. Jizi's statements and paintings provide supporting evidence for a new artistic practice of diversified ink-wash painting that helps to transform and enliven philosophical aesthetics. His images suggest that each of us has a chance to observe our own unification with a dimension of visible nature that, in turn, leads to thoughts about the uniqueness of others and about neighboring dimensions of a larger universe. Instead of retreating from the world, Jizi makes paintings about the immediacy of connection with the actuality of life. His paintings are about each of us with and alongside each other amid the complexity of multiple dimensions. One point is most fundamental. Jizi's artistic achievements are among the many contributions now being made by Chinese artists in the momentous currents now swirling and gathering in contemporary Chinese art and ink-wash painting.



Appendix
The Dao of Ink and Dharma Objects—On Jizi's Paintings

Gao Congyi

The stance that the ancient Daoist philosopher Laozi took in the world after he realized the "Way" (*dao*), as everyone knows, was a rejection of the world. A modern Western example would be Ludwig Wittgenstein who, after his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, saw the "Way" (*dao*), left the elite celebrity circle of Bertrand Russell, John Maynard Keynes and others, and ran off to a far away mountain village to become an elementary school teacher and church gardener for more than 15 years. Until his 27 June 2009 exhibition "The Way of Ink and Dharma Objects," Jizi's exhibition", Jizi's personal life had been hidden from the world for almost 70 years. As for the contributions of his artistic career, Jizi had been painting in silence for almost 50 years! After hearing this marvelous absurdity, one cannot but feel that it was a tragic and poignant fate, a really telling sign of a painter who gave his life to art.

A sharp difference between Jizi and his ancestor Laozi and the Westerner Wittgenstein is that the "disappearance" of the artist Jizi carried with it a sense of "being enforced" and the "tragedy" of the nation and its people during that era. At the time of the 1976 Tangshan earthquake, just before the death of Mao Zedong, Chinese intellectuals, including artists, had only some modes to choose from: they could be (Mao's) students, (state system) slaves, hidden from the world, or martyrs to their own ideology. One could not talk about an independent cultural life, and artists were the first to inhabit this strange world, painting chaotically and indiscriminately, with their dreams of making artistic contributions sabotaged. Jizi chose to survive by disappearing. On the one hand, he wore commoners' clothes, absolutely did not exercise his "right to speak", and avoided making his "alienation" a calamity. On the other hand, he crossed over to doing paintings of the sea, gradually realizing that worldly appearances are like "watching clouds form white garments that then became black dogs."[1] The towering decisiveness of his brush and ink were still on the distant horizon. Even so, the paucity of his artworks in his early period allowed him, after weighing the matter over and over, to destroy them voluntarily. Isn't this also a kind of suicide? This was a kind of cultural suicide that is different from the suicides of the novelist Lao She (1899–1966) and the translator and art critic Fu Lei (1908–1966), who took their own lives. Chinese intellectuals like Lao She and Fu Lei did not "endure", while those like Jizi "endured" until after 1977, "endured" until the "science spring," and "endured" until the "art spring."

The 1980s were a watershed for the Chinese society and also for Jizi. The period just before the mid-1980s was the first period of his painting, the period of brush and ink landscapes. *Snow Yak,* a painting that combines the noble and the beautiful, while harmonizing dynamism with sentiment, is a masterpiece of traditional realism and even more a self-portrait of Jizi's spirit. Dark brown, as the substrate of the style of primary colors, displayed the dark memories (black) of the tragic period and a spiritual schemata of the warm and surviving human vision (red). The top of the painting has mountain clouds in contact with the snowy aura (white); in the middle of the painting, high mountain yaks stand in the snow. There is no need to say more—an agreement is here, a spiritual binding. In the painting lone yaks have embarked on the spiritual peak! Too many hardships, too well honed, too thickly accumulated caused Jizi not only to be unable to remain in a pure and beautiful spiritual homeland but also to be unsatisfied with just treating with contempt the strictures on art. He was not only different from those national artists who painted sweet and vulgar figures but also different from those bewildering abstractionists. Jizi was like those high mountain yaks who had arrived at the foothills where the snow ends and whose eyes longed for the summit—a secret admonition to climb to the summit engraved in his mind.

After departing from the "Brush and Ink landscapes", during his so-called "Snow and Ice landscapes", Jizi had two natural objects for his choice of themes: the Great Wall in northern Hebei Province and the snow regions of Tibet. Selecting these two great objects was at a minimum the re-

[1] The allusion to clouds changing their transitory semblance from white garments to black dogs is taken from a poem by the Tang Dynasty poet Du Fu (born 712).

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sult of three bits of good luck. First, selecting the Great Wall in Hebei was for Jizi, a Hebei native, looking homeward, a predetermined existentialist encounter. Second was the lines from Mao Zedong's poem "Snow": "The vast frozen land is covered with ice. And the snow flits far-flung in the sky. On both sides of the Great Wall. The empty wilderness survives."[2] This poem is a symbol of the highest cultural vision, and it prepared the way for the acceptance of realism in historical studies. And third, the Great Wall meanders through the hills of Hebei, possesses a timeless ontological status, and is a symbol of the "Way". The Great Wall also signified that the painter was crossing a Rubicon, bidding farewell to the success and possibility of private enjoyment, and instead making himself set out again to create from heaven (*qian*) and earth (*kun*)[3] a realm of noble intentions and purity. The two works *Snow on the Great Wall and Waves Breaking on Shore* are expressions of and witnesses to this realm. In *Snow on the Great Wall* the Great Wall meanders, but where does it end? In *Waves Breaking on Shore* the sea of mountains and the waves of clouds are frightful; where can we find a mooring? The Tibetan snow region arrives responding to karma and says put brush to paper. First, the Tibetan snow region has mysterious and sacred aspects; second, in his "Snow and Ice Landscapes" period, Jizi's choice of the Tibetan snow region could not be more natural; and third, the image of a hidden, snowy region that is too mysterious and sacred provides the symbolic answer to the questions "where does it end?" and "where can we find a mooring?" If, for example, we say that the Great Wall of homeland Hebei is a brush and ink symbolic language for time, and the surging and frightening cloudy mountains are an artistic representation and generalization of life's quirks, then the far off snowy regions of Tibet are the brush and ink symbolic language for space, a figurative representation of a spiritual homeland. The distinction between the Hebei Great Wall and the Tibetan snow regions is time and space, the symbolic image of the road and the destination, and also the symbolic image of the last farewell. From the unification of time and space in the symbolic imagery of the Hebei earth and the Tibet heaven to the two paintings titled *Mixing Heaven (Qian) and Earth (Kun) and Great Herd* that represent the beginning of an ontology in which the universe is one, the artist then goes from "Snow and Ice Landscapes" to "The Dao of Ink Landscapes", from an aesthetic momentum to arriving at the spiritual wisdom of the mysteries of dharma objects (*fa xiang*).[4] "Ink" and the "Way" (*dao*) complete their final encounter as mutually presented and clarified. "Beauty" is the way that truth (*dao*) dwells in the world. From the dwelling of the "Way" (*dao*), Jizi's brush and ink open out on an incomparable purity, glory, and spirituality. For the past thousand years, Chinese painting formed a compositional paradigm known as the "three distances"[5]: the level distance (drawing an extensive space both horizontally and laterally); the high distance (looking from the base of a mountain to the peak); and the deep distance (glimpsing at other mountains from atop a mountain). The level distance is used the most, with high distance second. Though there is this third method, the deep distance, it is rarely used and basically absent from paintings. Jizi's "The Dao of Ink Landscapes" fundamentally uses this deep distance method for construction, for patterns, and to fill a void. We can say he is the master of this deep distance method. The method is an arduous one that opens up mountains and forests so merit goes to the pioneer. The mixing of heaven (*qian*) and earth (*kun*) and the solemnity of the dharma objects (*fa xiang*) are the wealth and honor of he who integrated them.

This is no accident. From the perspective of the philosophy of art, the above-described level distance and high distance methods rely even more on a person's eyes and external visual experiences to discriminate between two great humanistic aspirations: the graceful and lasting appeal of quietude and the lofty realm of movement. The deep distance method is quite different. Although we cannot say that this method has no relation to a person's sight and external visual experiences, deep distance first and foremost depends on a person's spiritual wisdom and inherent transcendental intuition. The level distance and high distance methods are more about "leaning about painting from nature's creations", while the deep distance method is more about "finding the source for a painting in your mind."[6] This without doubt puts quite a demand on an artist. In thousands of years of art history, the artists who could "find the source for a painting in their minds" are few in number. Many of them were Shitao's (1630–1724) "eminent monks who excelled with the brush" (according to Huang Binhong 1865–1955). Jizi's paintings to a great extent changed this historical pattern of Chinese painting. Jizi's paintings encompass three periods and styles: brush and ink landscapes, snow and ice landscapes, and the Dao of ink landscapes. Speaking from a creative paradigm,

[2] Translation of Mao's poem "Snow" is by Paul Wood, 1993, Tianjin People's Publishing House.

[3] *Qian* and *kun* are the two lines, solid and broken, respectively, that represent heaven and earth and make up the eight trigrams that, in ancient China, formed basic schemata for the universe.

[4] "Dharma objects" is a key concept of the Buddhist "Consciousness-only School", whose major tenet is that nothing exists independent of the mind. The word "Dharma" stands for all past, present, and future things and events, while the term "objects" describes the result of the interaction between those things or events and mind.

[5] The method of the "three distances," level, deep, and high distances, is an artistic theory formulated by the Song Dynasty artist and scholar Guo Xi (1023–1085).

[6] "Learning about painting from nature's creations, but finding the source for paintings in your mind" is an artistic theory formulated by the seventh century Tang artist and scholar Zhang Zao.

Jizi's paintings exactly correspond to what traditional Chinese painting calls the three methods of level, deep, and high distances. Jizi's the Dao of ink landscapes, in particular, use and practice the deep distance method. Although Jizi himself was influenced by the religiosity of the "other shore" philosophies of Shitao and Blaise Pascal (1623–6162), with respect to the two aspects of creative mentality and the general appearance of paintings, he still "implemented the pursuit of Chinese painting for the highest spiritual realm" (according to Jizi), and without doubt this is a significant gain and good news for traditional Chinese painting. The name and the theme of "The Dao of Ink and Dharma Objects" appropriately epitomizes the highest realms of spirituality and painting. In traditional Chinese culture, the spirit of China's thought is pictured as an ancient cauldron with three legs representing Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. In the term "Dao of Ink and Dharma Objects" itself, we can see the deep colors of this cauldron. Faced with vast and profound artworks, the critics approved: these paintings "are by a modern landscape artist who, after returning to the concept of 'insight into the Dao', has created new graphic representations and a new realm" (Jia Fangzhou); these paintings "give new life to the universe and mankind's past" (Yin Shuangxi); and these paintings have "mysteries that nature hides" (Danto). "The Dao of Ink", from the "source in Jizi's mind", has finally arrived at a universal pure realm! With regards to this loyal "artist", after a long period of great testing, the world finally pays him some small formal courtesies! This will be seen as iconic, but it has symbolic significance.

If we are only talking about the specific time, Jizi's "Dao of Ink" came into our world along with the twenty-first century. The trends of "coloration", "geometric symbols", and "construction and ink" of the past two years were not the start of the "Dao of Ink", but rather they derived from an internal response to the "Dao of Ink." These trends sprung from the "Dao of Ink" realm and adjusted and changed to it. To be more specific, these trends appeared as "The Dao of Ink Landscapes" and changed to "Dharma Objects", and from the initial emerging these dharma objects gradually approached their grandeur. Beyond this, we are not well-versed and this is where questions and misunderstandings arise.

The first of these questions and misunderstandings is that, when some of our friends are faced with the modernity and the "composition series" of Jizi's "Dharma Objects", they say that Gu Wenda (born 1955), Zhao Wuji (1921–2013), and other artists have already explored and presented this composition series. My response to these friends is that, as a technique, "composing" is a key logical element for humankind. As game playing, children's toy blocks are vivid and intuitive; as painting, there are extensive precedents in Picasso's cubism (composition) and Viennese Neo-expressionism (colors), and China was a successor to these. As for the method of "Dao", I have seen none who can compare to Jizi's "The Dao of Ink and Dharma Objects" or his "Grandeur of Dharma Objects." The subtitle of Jizi's "Composed Ink Paintings" is "a dialogue with the Dao." Jizi is the product of an ontological realm, and he "composes" by following his karma, not by playing with drawing techniques. This should make us feel remorse for half the questions and misunderstandings. Modern? This is both too rich and also too vague. There is absolutely no doubt that Jizi's "The Dao of Ink and Dharma Objects" enhances the modernity of China's ink painting but does not in the slightest blur the modernity of other artists. Since he was a person from the lower ranks of the nation's fate and both aloof and alone in the world, if Jizi's creations are really similar to some other artist, then this can only be explained as a providential wonder.

The second of these questions and misunderstandings is that "Observing Tibet from Hebei" is for the artist Jizi a duality. During his "Snow and Ice Landscape" period, some people queried the artist: "You have never been to Tibet, so how can you paint snowy Tibet?" These types of views are limited and merely form what the Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi called "chit chat." It does not seem to matter that, from an aesthetic or an ontological perspective, the artist Jizi's "Observing Tibet from Hebei" is reasonable and legitimate. Actually, with respect to Jizi himself, whether or not "Observing Tibet from Hebei" in the "The Dao of Ink and Dharma Objects" was necessarily worth it, it is something really worth pondering.

Speaking merely of an external civilized ecology, a full twenty years ago, the talented poet Zha Haisheng (1964–1989), popularly known as Hai Zi, after his encounter with the "Dao"—even if it was only through an aesthetic theme—laid down on a track near the Great Wall in Hebei and committed suicide. Confucius lived to the "seldom seen age of 70" and died in his sleep. In the "Analects of Confucius", he stated quite frankly that "Having heard the Dao in the morning, one may die without regret that evening." From brush and ink landscapes to snow and ice landscapes, and from snow and ice landscapes to the Dao of ink landscapes, Jizi did all these landscapes for himself. Now that he has encountered the "Dao", from "The Dao of Ink Landscapes" to the "The Dao of Ink and Dharma Objects", Jizi is living for others. And for what do those others live? We won't mention the slaves to consumer fetishes, money, enjoyment, and power, or those monastic managers who take the "Dharma Objects" as a binding duty to destroy their fellow monks! Jizi's earnest remonstrations, his poor dress but rich spirituality, his use of ink to "channel" (Dao) Dharma objects, his use of the brush to reveal the realm of the "Dao", and his brush and ink tools have an ontological view of Dharma objects, a Daoist realm, and a homeland! Speaking from the perspective of an art ontologist, the Daoist realm of "brush and ink" is a "realm of clarity" for painting. Given the ancient Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi's ideological principle

that "first there must be authentic people only then can there be authentic knowledge", Chinese painting's "realm of clarity" must perforce rely on the artist himself attaining to the "realm of clarity." The "realm of clarity" is a fundamental issue and key concept in Western art. Heidegger has made it clear that, as far as this key concept of "realm of clarity" goes, the poems and songs of the German poet Johann Holderlin (1770–1843) and his existential thought cannot but be associated with it. Jizi's painting, hidden for a long 50 years, finally turned to the "Dao of Ink" paintings and brought them into the "realm of clarity." To a basic extent, this development "cannot but be associated" with the ontological thinking in modern Chinese academic circles that claims "a responsibility to enquire about the Dao." Jizi is a great master of the Dao of ink's spirit of freedom, aloofness, and labor of love that burst with a childlike sincerity and purity. Jizi's new work continues, fully indicating his merits, sentiments, and results.

An Individual Soul? A Heavenly Task?

If we select a simple and sincere manner of description, then Jizi is a painter's painter who has really revived for us the original image of the artist and the significance of an artist's work. As for historical awareness, it was no later than the Tang dynasty when Zhu Jingxuan, in his "*Record of Famous Paintings of the Tang Dynasty*", said: "The painter is a sage who surpasses at finishing what heaven and earth cannot, and displaying what the sun and the moon do not illuminate." With these remarks, he stated the matter quite clearly. Looking from the perspective of the newly passed twentieth century, the challenges for reviving the image of the artist as "sage" and reviving the significance of his work are unprecedented, and unless there is natural intervention and help, the revival is very difficult to imagine. It is only in the atmosphere of natural intervention and help that we can become enlightened about Jizi as a painter who all his life "has made the Dao a companion." It is only in that way that we can learn about his attachment, loyalty and clarity concerning the "Dao of Ink." As to the external world in which technique flourishes even as art itself is degraded, without doubt Jizi's "The Dao of Ink and Dharma Objects" is a marvel of contemporary art and civilization, and at a minimum a visual happiness that we will find difficult to view again. That "people from the same house are friends while people going the same way (*dao*) are companions" has long been an axiom. I myself have slightly hidden those friends whom I daily get to know better and with whom I bend my ear to the Dao; but as for Jizi's painting career and destiny, in my heart of hearts, I have always considered them a blessing and an honor.

Ink Paintings: Existence and Transcendence—A Review of Jizi's Art

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Synopsis

The purpose of this essay is to interpret the explorations and practices of Jizi's art, to analyze the processes and ideas in his art, and to comment on Jizi's artistic practices by clarifying the following four aspects: what Jizi inherited from traditional Chinese ink painting, what he learned from Western paintings, how he gradually transcended these paintings, and how he created the Dao of ink landscapes, with a view to exploring the significance and possibilities of the Dao of ink landscapes

Jizi's artworks are primarily ink and brush landscapes that not only seek to create novel forms but also strive to achieve a transcendent realm that induces deep contemplation.

From the end of the 1950s, Jizi began to cultivate assiduously the fertile field of China's landscape art. For what has now been more than 50 years, Jizi studied traditional landscape art to achieve his own style. He explored a new technique for painting that produced his snow and ice landscapes and then began pursuing what the artist himself calls the "Dao of Ink Landscapes," an artistic form that strives to find ways to express space in landscape paintings.

1. An Analytic Inheritor of Traditional Chinese Ink Painting

It is well known that China's traditional landscape painting started in the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317–420). From the Tang (618–907) to the Song (960–1279) dynasties, traditional landscape painting had established itself as primarily a literati painting aesthetic. As it developed during the Yuan (1271–1368) and Ming (1368–1644) Dynasties, traditional landscape painting gradually became a complete set of literati painting norms. Early in the Tang Dynasty, the literati assessed paintings via the four categories of spirited (*shen*), subtle (*miao*), competent (*neng*), and unaffected (*yi*) (i.e., without artificiality). During the Northern Song dynasty, the scholar and art historian Huang Xiufu rearranged these four categories; he made the unaffected, a category that remains aloof from convention, the highest category. Huang explained: "The unaffected category is the most difficult to grasp. It clumsily draws squares and circles, and looks down on minute use of colors. The brushwork is simple but the forms complete, and they are obtained naturally. It cannot be imitated because it is intentional, and one who sees it will exclaim it: 'an unaffected work.'"

This admiration for the unaffected category clearly shows that the literati painting aesthetic had become established. This aesthetic negates brightness and colors, advocating simplicity and elegance instead, and it also negates deliberately seeking to make the painting similar to its subject, advocating "obtaining the essence and forgetting the image"[7] instead. This aesthetic negates the depiction of worldly relationships, advocating a poetic lyricism instead, and it negates meticulous portraiture, in favor of a calligraphic brush style. Painters added seal inscriptions, and they gradually emphasized displaying lyricism, creating a poetic mood, and seeking after the appeal of brush and ink.

The literati painting style integrated poetry, calligraphy, painting, and seal carving. From the simple, light paintings of Ni Yunlin (1301–1374) to the splashes of Xu Tingteng (1521–1593), the brilliance of the Tang and Northern Song periods gradually faded, and the original but not quite fully matured rules for realism in modeling gradually lost the conditions necessary for their in-depth development. This made the insufficiency of the rational spirit in Chinese traditional literati paintings a defect that became even more pronounced after the influential Yuan Dynasty painter and calligrapher Zhao Mengfu (1254–1322) declared: "What we value in painting is the old conception. If there is no old conception, even if the painting is skillful, it has no value." This led to the common practice of literati painters esteeming the old. The Ming Dynasty painter and scholar Dong Qichang's (1555–1636) famous remark about "reading thousands of books and traveling thousands of miles" was actually taken to mean just viewing thousands of old paintings. Right up until the first four emperors of the Qing Dynasty, imitating the ancients

[7] A statement made by the philosopher Wang Bi (226–249) in discussing the book of changes.

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was held in high esteem, causing literati painters to become even further removed from naturalness and to come to the end of their road. Accordingly, when the Qing painter Shitao (1642–1707) advocated for nature-oriented painting, the emergence of the type of artistic thinking that produced Shitao's masterpiece, "Searching Among the Peaks" (painted in 1691), shook the world of Chinese painting like an earthquake.

In his early years, Jizi strived to study and learn the many aspects of traditional landscape painting. In one respect, he is the inheritor of the good points of traditional literati painting: not only did he earnestly study the verdant greens of the brush and ink technique of the Dong Yuan (died 962) and Ju Ran (907–960) Southern School of landscape painting, intuiting the expression of a poeticized artistic mood, but he also strove to learn calligraphy and seal carving. In another respect, because of a personality preference, Jizi was partial to the great patterns and the imposing manner of the Northern Sung panoramic landscapes, and even more fond of the dense and vast styles of the Song Dynasty painter Huang Gongwang (1269–1354) and the Yuan Dynasty painter Wang Meng (1308–1385). Jizi did not advocate hasty, unaffected brush work or impromptu brush splashes, and he most certainly did not advocate painting a few slipshod brush strokes that inscribe the whole piece with written characters. This was no doubt the initial germination of a fine sense of awareness of artistic independence. After 5 or 6 years of hard work, in 1964, Jizi took up the theme of the Tang poem by Meng Haoran (691–740) in a painting titled "Meng Haoran Passing an Old Friend's Village." This painting prominently displayed the features of traditional landscape painting that Jizi, as its inheritor, had both discarded and retained, and also displayed his solid grounding in the skills of traditional landscape painting. (See Fig. 3.9)

As the inheritor of traditional art, there is another important aspect of the tradition that Jizi discerningly discovered: the connotations of the transcendental spirit that permeates the ideas of China's traditional literati paintings. As we all know, "using a text to carry the Dao,"[8] and "using a painting to reveal the Dao" are the highest realms to which China's ink paintings have always aspired. Early in the creation of landscape painting in the period of the Northern and Southern Dynasties (220–589), the scholar and artist Zong Bing (375–443) expounded his ideas that "landscape painting uses shapes to entice the Dao;" landscape painting reaches the joy of benevolence (*ren*) and wisdom (*zhi*), and frees the spirit. Zong Bing also said: "Only when one purifies his mind can one glimpse the Dao, and then (by means of looking at landscape paintings) one can travel even when confined." Zong Bing's contemporary, Wang Wei, also advocated "using a brush to imitate the substance of the Dao."

In the Tang Dynasty, Zhang Yanyuan (mid-ninth century) said this about using the brush for calligraphy and painting: "Conserve the spirit, concentrate on what is unique, use appropriate skills, and make use of (the Tang Dynasty painter) Wu Sheng's brush methods. All techniques that reach the sublime follow this method. Why stop (at the painter wielding the brush). The ancient (ancient) butcher Bao Ding wielding his knife and the Master Carpenter wielding his carpenter's square even achieved this sublimity."[9] During the Qing Dynasty, Shitao, in his book "Quotations on Art," explained in detail his thoughts on "Putting passion into the brush and ink, and availing yourself of mountains and streams to represent the Dao." Shitao used his uniqueness theory of painting[10] to develop a thesis that he later summarized by saying: "The artist responsible for art, who manages to create life from chaos, who uses his artistic uniqueness to bring order to the myriad of things, and the myriad of things to express that uniqueness, such an artist is not responsible for painting mountains, waters, for wielding brush and ink, for old and new art, or for the sages; no, that artist is responsible solely for his artistic creativity."[11] In his book "On the Art of Painting," Shitao pointed out that: "The uniqueness of painting has no other ultimate than the Dao of Heaven and Earth." Shitao's discussions on painting fully embodied the concept of using art to intuit the Dao, and they became the classic summary of the spirit and essence of traditional literati paintings.

After several decades of practicing art, Jizi forged his own independent thinking and did a nuanced analysis of intellectual artistic qualities. From his own personal realization, Jizi gained a penetrating grasp of the transcendental spirit of "purifying the mind to glimpse the Dao," and using painting to reveal the Dao. Jizi followed the aesthetic objective of "using a brush that spotlights and captures an image to paint a painting cherished by all."[12] Jizi's relentless pursuit of artistic exploration was the foundation for his art form the "Dao of Ink Landscapes," and it was also the basis for his internal thinking about his own line of succession to traditional art.

If we examine Jizi's journey as an artist, his inherent relationship with China's classical tradition of painting is this: first, he chose a magnificent, bold style and then promoted the rational factors in traditional painting. He learned to express a poeticized realm in his paintings and sought to ex-

[8] Dao (also written as Dao) means literally "a road, a way" and is the predominant concept in the Chinese philosophy known as Daoism.

[9] Quotations from the early Daoist work, the *Book of Zhuangzi* (369–286 BCE).

[10] In Chinese: *yi hua lun* (一画论)。

[11] The translation of this passage is based on the explication given by Wu Guanzhong in his

"Wo kan Shitao hua yulu," Dajia Chubanshe, 2010, China.

[12] Attributed to the late Ming and early Qing philosopher Wang Fuzhi (1619–1692).

press lyricism. Out of respect for stele calligraphy, he diligently practiced it with brush and ink. Finally, Jizi carried forward traditional painting's development of "purifying the mind to glimpse the Dao," as well as the spiritual meaning of "using painting to realize the Dao;" and he concluded with explorations that resulted in the unique appearance of his Dao of ink landscapes.

As the saying goes, one who criticizes the inherited tradition has to capture its essence while discarding its dregs, but how to capture and discard differs for each individual. In Jizi's case, he used his own thoughts on culture and philosophy and his unremitting exploration and practice to convey specifically his personal ideas about what should be captured and what should be discarded. The cultural value of what Jizi captured and discarded aligned him with the rational trend and transcendent essence of his artistic spirit, while at the same time it provided a unique and special reference for answering the question of how best to inherit traditional art.

2. Learning from Western Art, While Keeping the Spirit of Chinese Art as the Substance

How to learn from and assimilate Western art has since modern times been a question explored in a variety of ways. Generally speaking, however, no matter how China assimilates the strong points of Western art, Chinese painting must not lose its essential characteristics. That Chinese painting must possess its own national characteristics is a basic consensus reached in scholarly circles. For this reason, every artist who strives to develop and innovate Chinese painting must profoundly research the pros and cons of China's traditional art and make a comparison of the height of cultural development in Chinese art and to the advances in Western art in order to take the spirit of Chinese art as the substance while assimilating the strong points of Western art via analysis and discernment. This comparison thus advances an exploration that both continues tradition and opens up new ground. Only in this way can artists successfully blaze a new trail of innovation for Chinese painting.

Since recent times, a great many analytical theorists have discussed the differences between Chinese art and Western art. These discussions clearly show that recognizing and summarizing the different features of both Western and Chinese arts and, via a mastery of both, reaching a thorough understanding of both, is not only beneficial to the development of China's national culture but also an issue that China must always face. Recently, in connection with the differences between Chinese and Western paintings, some theorists have concluded: "Western art is rational; Chinese art, perceptual. Western art is influenced by scientific thinking, while Chinese art is edified by a cultural energy. Chinese art, in comparison to Western art possesses more cultural value" (Ye Zi). This type of criticism, with respect to understanding Chinese and Western classical paintings, has without doubt a certain broad significance. Nevertheless, this criticism also has its inaccuracies. The tendency of Western art to be influenced by scientific thinking is essentially an expression of a type of rationalist spirit; and while we cannot say that this rationalist spirit is not cultural as well, we most assuredly cannot say that it lacks cultural value. We also cannot generalize that Chinese painting by comparison is perceptual. Actually, Chinese and Western arts belong to two different cultural systems, each of which expresses different concepts of cultural values and two different cultural spirits.

As I have said previously, it is only in a few aspects that we can say that Chinese classical painting lacks rationality, and we absolutely cannot characterize Chinese painting as relatively more perceptual than rational. Traditional Chinese painting did not strive for a strict reproduction of actual objects, and it did not develop scientific modeling rules in depth. The birds and flowers of the Northern Song Painting Academy are, of course, realistic, but they uniformly incurred negative aesthetic judgments from literati painters, a negation that brought about *a priori* defects in forming rational shapes in Chinese painting.

With regard to the reality of Chinese paintings, however, they show attention to the shape of objects and use appropriate colors. We cannot say that a deep understanding of artistic principles and a clever use of artistic skills is not an expression of a rationalist spirit. Of the four criteria for criticizing paintings, three, namely, ability, subtlety, and spirituality, are without doubt descriptions of painting lifelike forms. These three describe paintings that contain both form and energy, have a lively spirit, and steadily attain critical standards. This is a steadily advancing process whereby the artist first acquires skill, then draws, first seeking the shape and then seeking the likeness; and finally, "obtaining the essence and forgetting the form," the artist seeks a method beyond methodology and achieves a surpassingly free and natural style.

We can see that traditional Chinese painting did not blindly deny the creation of forms but rather wanted to excel on the basis of the interplay between heart and hand, rising up to the level where "one draws circles and squares without a ruler or compass, and puts energy into the colors" and not remaining at the level where one is a draftsman seeking to become an artist. In view of this rational nature of Chinese painting, it is inadequate to link Chinese painting with a lack of scientific rules for modeling.

As an artist striving to develop Chinese painting, the entry point for assimilating Western art is first to start with introducing scientific modeling aspects. The development of Chinese painting in recent times bears strong testimony to this point. Although the Tang artist Zhang Zao's maxim—"Learn about painting from nature's creations, but find the source for paintings in your mind"—dates from the Tang Dynasty, it has since then been the motto for Chinese painting generally. Due to the fact that Zhang Zao himself did not leave a detailed explanation of this maxim, those who came after

him held flexible opinions as to the meaning of the maxim. "Learn about paintings from nature's creations" has thus been interpreted variously to mean: seek the subject of a painting's appearance, spiritual essence, power, substance, natural appearance, or spiritual enjoyment. Zhang's maxim has also been taken to mean understanding the subject of a painting in depth and with sophistication. In short, "to learn about painting from nature's creations" is made the basis for painting what one desires.

Only in the early Qing Dynasty did Shitao in his "Quotations on Art" attribute the following three specifics to Zhang's maxim to "learn about painting from nature's creations." First, seek a rational method, maintain the ability to reproduce nature, study in depth the object's raison d'être, and make every effort to paint its true condition. Shitao's following statements are fundamental to rationality and method: "A painter is one who knows the shapes and forms of the myriad of things in the world. When the mountain peak and the method for showing its shades and textures agree, then the painting method produces the mountain peak. If one does not know the peak, then how can one transform (it into a painting), and if one does not have the method for showing the peak's shades and textures, then how can one make the peak appear (in a painting)." Second, seek the essence of the form to complete the principles of Yin and Yang. Shitao stated: "The uniqueness of my painting is that it penetrates both the form and essence of mountains and streams." Again, "The painter bares the soul of mountains, streams, and the myriad of things, because the painter has the power to nurture life." And again, "If the ink cannot introduce vitality, then the brush cannot paint the essence; when both the ink and brush are able, then the Yin and the Yang are freed; when the hand creates from chaos, then conveying both the ancient and the modern into one work is the result of wisdom." Third, combine heaven and the human to seek your individuality. Shitao said: "Whoever paints the changes to all under Heaven has a great method and is among the elite who can paint the forms of mountains and streams. Those painters and molders who created things both in ancient and present times, they passed smoothly over the principles of Yin and the Yang, taking hold of the ink and brush to paint the myriad of things between Heaven and earth, training and teaching themselves." Shitao also said: "To establish his spirit in the sea of ink, and to create life at the tip of his brush, to paint rich content within a small area, to bring order out of chaos, the artist, even if there is no brush or ink or painting, persists in his art." And again: "As for a mountain and a stream having me represent them, the mountains and streams are created by me and I am created by the mountains and streams; our spirits encounter each other and art is made." Shitao's statements can be taken as the best explanation of "learning about painting from nature's creations."

Shitao's thoughts on painting appeared enlightened to his contemporaries and served to correct the reverence for antiquity advocated by the four landscape painters of the early Qing Dynasty, namely Wang Shimin (1642–1715), Wang Hui (1632–1717), Wang Jian (1598–1677), and Wang Yuanqi (1642–1715), known collectively as the "Four Wangs." Shitao's statement that an artist should "search for the most unusual peaks and then start painting" ran counter to the Four Wangs' reverence for antiquity, but was widely disseminated among artists. Due to the limitations of the period, however, Shitao's ideas on painting did not lead to the establishment of a scientific method for creating forms. The Four Wangs and their reverence for antiquity continued adversely to influence Qing Dynasty art circles.

Only in the recent times when the Western studies entered China did some young people break through tradition and start to learn from the West. This occurred especially during the "May Fourth Movement" (1919) when Chen Duxiu (1879–1942) was the first to advocate the spirit of realistic painting in order to transform a dispirited Chinese art. Those who answered Chen's call, such as Xu Beihong (1895–1953) and other artists who were members of the Reform School, advocated Western art's use of models to learn drawing, and these reform artists made gratifying achievements. Even more important was the period after the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949 when the ideology of artistic realism occupied a prominent position, leading many contemporary Chinese artists to tread the path of deepening their life experiences and changing their painting methods by the use of drawings. This created a generation of Chinese artists who reached significant milestones. They strengthened the rational characteristics of Chinese painting, pushing it painting to a new genre of development.

Jizi started his specialization in landscape painting during the 1950s, a period of reform in Chinese painting. After he learnt the requisite traditional skills, he proceeded from Shitao's advocacy of reform and smoothly and logically started out on the road of facing life, transforming his art via sketching and drawing, and gradually forming his own artistic style. He started first by doing a complete study of Shitao's "Quotations on Art," determined to "enter into traditional art on a rational basis, and also come out from traditional art on a rational basis." He consolidated his experiences and attempted techniques to express scenes of northern China. Because he lacked the foundation of experience in actually making drawings of northern China, initially he was of course unsuccessful. He also went to the north to attempt to paint from nature there, but he could not free himself of the antique ways of using brush strokes to show the shades and textures of rocks and mountains.

At the end of the 1960s, Jizi borrowed from a friend Takashima Hokkais (1850–1931) "The Essential Method for Drawing Mountains," translated into Chinese by the artist

and critic Fu Baoshi (1904–1965). He was immediately convinced by the book's incisive arguments, scientific analysis, and the large number of sketches included therein. He read the book carefully, repeatedly trying to fathom it, finally realizing that he could not engrave it in his mind or even keep it in his hands. So he immediately copied out the whole book and even conscientiously traced the more than one hundred illustrated drawings in the book. This one volume of "The Essential Method for Drawing Mountains" had a profound impact on Jizi, as it laid out for him a solid way to conduct field sketches. He said: "Recognizing the principles that create mountains and streams from the aspects of geology and topography, and grasping the shapes of mountain ranges and rushing streams was for an artist just like studying the anatomy of nature: my mind understood it, and my painting hand followed. Mr. Takashima's book is a volume on the anatomy of mountains and streams." It is just this kind of scientific knowledge—not only rooted in experience but at the same time also theoretical—that took Jizi into the wilds of the Yan Mountains and the middle of Tai Xing Mountain to make sketches. This knowledge also caused him to take the fine points of using ink and brush from contemporary artists Li Keran (1907–1989), Qian Songyan (1899–1985), and Song Wenzhi (1919–1999). These gradually became his own individual style of ink and brush landscape painting. Absorbing the scientific principles of creating shapes enriched the rational factors in Jizi's artworks.

Jizi not only proceeded to probe deeply into ways to absorb the requirements of scientific modeling and shaping. He also absorbed the Western means of expressing shapes with two-dimensional segments at the same time, and he used this to advance the artistic sense of volume and bulk. Jizi absorbed Western classical paintings' use of profound understatement to process images and to increase a macroscopic and farsighted sense of mass. Simultaneously, he also absorbed Japan's Higashiyama Kaii's ability to express rich colors in simple objects and his contrast of blacks and whites in printmaking that strengthened the macroscopic effect of color composition. These provided Jizi an effective guarantee to express the connotations of majesty, depth, and solemnity in his shapes. We can see that Jizi, in his absorption of elements of Western art, made a completely rational analysis of the pros and cons of Chinese traditional art.

From the perspective of a comparison of Eastern and Western art, it would seem that Western modern painting and China's traditional literati art have many points in common. As we previously stated, China's traditional literati ink drawings put more emphasis on expressing the spirit of the subject, described as "finding the source for paintings in your mind," and "a painter paints with his mind."

China's traditional literati paintings, however, are not simply expressions of the subject's emotions. They are rather are a kind of expression of transcendence that "uses a brush to embody the Dao," in a way that "goes beyond the external appearance to obtain what that appearance encircles." This transcendence has certain points in common with Western modern schools of painting such as Expressionism, Abstractionism, and Surrealism, but it also has essential differences. We all know that, since the Renaissance, the systems of modeling that have been constructed have played an important role in the development of art. Nevertheless, when one type of art reaches its peak, then it can start to go the opposite way. Strict scientific modeling eventually leads to art that is a superb virtual reproduction. But in the deliberate pursuit of visual reality it weakens and restrains the display of an artist's thoughts and feelings, eventually causing art to descend into a type of rigid, academic model, resulting in artists rebelling against this "simulationism."[13]

With the theory of simulated reproduction, modern art has come to a dead end, and is now evincing an innovative attitude that challenges traditional art. From Romanticism to Expressionism, from Abstractionism to Surrealism, all of these movements have stressed that a simple reproduction of objective images is most definitely not the goal of art. These movements all advocate full expression of subjective emotions, paintings that are lyrical, paintings that express a person's subconscious dreams, and so on. These movements assure us that there is something more important in art than visual reality. There is also an inspiring dynamic that moves people in a way that visual reality cannot. These movements have much in common with Chinese art's not seeking strict shapes, its opposition to being a draftsman rather than an artist, and its advocation of expressing one's feelings. The difference between these movements and Chinese art is this: the eternal truth of Chinese art, namely the "Learning about painting from nature's creations, but finding the source for paintings in your mind." This rather simple yet profound statement confirms that Chinese art will neither go to the extreme of becoming the very image of nature nor to the extreme of being an expression of pure subjectivity.

Chinese art is an art with a strong assimilative nature, and its development and advancement is pioneered in an integrative mix. It was just in view of this special feature of the spirit of Chinese art that Jizi, in his explorations, did not blindly follow the forms of modern Western schools of painting. Rather, Jizi analyzed and borrowed from modern Western schools of painting based on the inner necessities for developing Chinese art. Or we can say that, after making a comparison of modern Western schools of painting and Chinese traditional painting, Jizi absorbed their most beneficial components and used these to search for and create his own art. Specifically, he made a comparison of the Expressionist's emphasis on conveying subjective feelings and

[13] Chinese: *moni lun* (模拟论)。

China's expression of one's heartfelt feelings to strengthen the awareness of expressing his own emotions.

Jizi made a comparison of the Abstractionist's structural rules and searched them to convey a musical effect. He also searched for 'grand music' and the harmony of heaven and earth to strengthen his awareness of using modification and reconstruction to express a musical effect. He distinguished Surrealism's seeking to express the human subconscious and dream worlds, and he compared this with China's seeking the realm where heaven and humanity are one; a realm where a pure mind glimpses the Dao, strengthens one's awareness of the universe, and defines one's transcendent seeking for the goal of expressing the spirit of the universal Dao. At this point, Jizi's seeking a musical effect penetrated his learning and thinking about the three aspects just mentioned. In his "Concerning the Spiritual in Art," Wassily Kadinsky wrote: "Music is just the kind of art that expresses both the artist's soul and the independent life that creates music, for music is not the replication of natural phenomena." And again: "When he is anxious to have art express his spiritual life, a painter who is not satisfied with reproducing life and nature cannot help but envy music—the one art that at present lacks substance but unexpectedly and easily achieves this goal of expressing an artist's spiritual life. The artist then involuntarily use musical methods in his own art" (page 30). Jizi's explorations of the Dao of ink landscapes quite similarly uses an untitled musical composition mode to express his own intuition of the spirit of the universal Dao and to express a transcendent feeling that is noble, solemn, sublime, and profound.

Throughout Jizi's learning from and absorbing of Western painting, no matter whether it was ancient or modern paintings, all had the spirit of Chinese culture as the essential element and were analyzed to determine what to keep and what to discard. He merged the beneficial elements of Western painting, not because he wanted to reform Chinese painting but because he wanted to develop Chinese painting. He wanted to create new techniques of expression for Chinese painting, and he wanted to explore new ways to express space in Chinese painting.

3. Progressive Levels of Transcendental Paintings

Due to the fact that the theory of Chinese painting definitely does not take the ability to paint as the measure of a painting's value, but rather evaluates a painting by the level of its spiritual meaning, the theory of realms, that is, the realm a painting attains, is a special feature of Chinese art theory. The contemporary artist and critic Zong Baihua (1897–1986), when discussing realms in Chinese painting, has said: "Why are Chinese artists not satisfied with purely objective, mechanical drawings? Because the realm of Chinese painting is not a single plane of natural reproduction but rather the creation of realms of painting, with each realm having a deeper level. In all, there are three levels: the drawing of an object as directly perceived through the visual sense; the conveying of the dynamism of life; and the revealing of the highest spiritual realm" (Zong Baihua "The Birth of Realms in the Visual Arts")

In summarizing his own artistic process, Jizi divided his creativity into three progressive genres: continuation, rebirth, and pioneering. By the continuation genre, he means that on the basis of continuing traditional painting and by means of deeply investigating life in order to make progress in sketching, while at the same time consulting the works of contemporary artists of merit, he obtained a profound understanding of painting and gradually formed his own brush and ink style. Using a familiar adage to sum this up, we can say that Jizi "continued the traditional but was not confined by tradition, deeply investigated life to blend the strong points of different artists, and so formed his own style." What Jizi was seeking in this genre was to use his own skills with brush and ink to express real mountains and real streams, that is, the mountains and the scenes that one sees with one's eyes. These belong to the category of scenery that one already sees physically and emotionally, and the basic spirit is Realism.

By the rebirth genre, Jizi means using principally his own sentiments in order to create an expressive realm that surpasses Realism. In order to achieve this goal, he had to break through the techniques used by previous artists and proceed to explore and create the breaking of new artistic ground. His creative spirit in this genre was, in the words of Shitao: "from the depths of my heart, using my own abilities, I will decide how to use the brush and how to apply the ink." What Jizi was seeking in this genre was not a pure, objective reproduction but rather the ability to paint a creative realm of "the mountains and scenes in one's mind" that belong to the category known as "having one's mind set in a profound artistic mood."[14] In this genre, the artist's individuality is particularly distinctive and the basic spirit is Romanticism. While this genre is close in several aspects to Expressionism, it still remains in the category of conventional, rational painting.

By the pioneering genre, Jizi means that conceptually he wanted to go beyond the physical realm that simply shows images, and advance to the metaphysical realm. In this genre, the artist wants his creations to express the universal spirit of the Dao that "is beyond the image, but obtained from what the Dao encompasses." To accomplish this, the artist collects all the images—the abstract, the concrete, and the mental—and gives them a macro realization that has a unified, music like effect. In order to obtain this goal, the artist must proceed with a full range of exploration and creation from thought to framework, from technique to expression,

[14] The Chinese term is "*xin zhong qiu huo*" and literally means "the hills and valleys in one's mind." The expression, a literary trope used by Chinese literati since the Tang Dynasty, describes the profound mood of someone about to undertake a literary or artistic work.

and other such aspects of painting. The creative spirit in this genre is described variously as: "a pure mind glimpsing the Dao," "a pure mind getting the sense of an object," "using the Dao to discuss art, and using art to embody the Dao; and seeking method and image from the Dao." What the artist seeks in this genre is to transcend merely showing the features of mountains and streams in order to realize the materialization of the "realm of Dao," that is, to paint "mountains and scenes in the Dao."

For several decades Jizi persevered in his explorations. In the early years, he called his own little corner of the world such names as "The Bitter Blue Studio" and "The Studio for Chanting in the Withering Cold;" hence, we realize just how difficult it was for him in the beginning. It was just in this bitter cold period that he assiduously studied previous artists, establishing a solid foundation in traditional painting. From the end of the 1960s, he began to explore his own style. He worked during the day while at night he calmed his mind in order to delve into art, but it was a difficult time nonetheless. In the beginning of the 1970s, he started from personal experience and called his corner of the world "The Not Easy Studio." It was just in these difficult circumstances that his explorations took shape as ink and brush landscapes painted in his own style. He continued his own style creating his manifestations of the frozen ice and fluttering snows of the North Country, the biting cold, and tragic majesty of the Yan Mountain ice and snow landscapes. At the end of the 1980s, following the impact of the rise of business in China, one by one artists began to engage in business; but Jizi continued to abide by the ancient Daoist precepts of "extreme emptiness and guarded quietude" (i.e., remaining unperturbed by what others do and concentrating instead on quietly honing a skill).[15]

At this time, Jizi changed his studio name to "The Determined Studio," and continued his profound exploration. These explorations finalized in the experimental paintings that became the artistic expression known as the "Dao of Ink Landscapes." The dictum for Jizi's "The Not Easy Studio" was: "It is not easy for those who know the difficulties, but there are many who, because they know the difficulties, lower their expectations. It is thus especially not easy to know the difficulties but still not lower one's expectations." Thus, one who does not lower his expectations but instead makes them definite, such a person is really noble, and this nobility represented that profound spiritual essence necessary to advance Jizi's art.

In a comprehensive view of the course of his art and his artworks, we see that the artistic realm that Jizi was seeking in his brush and ink landscapes belonged to the same category as the works of the contemporary artists Qian Songyan and Song Wenzhi (mentioned above). The originality of Jizi's snow and ice landscapes is that he understood the weak points of classical landscape painting in displaying snowy mountains and frozen peaks, and hence he created such special techniques as the rough, choppy, slanting, and hollow brush methods for showing the textures of snow and ice. The two kinds of artworks, Jizi's brush and ink landscapes and his snow and ice landscapes, however, formed a solid foundation for Jizi to proceed to explore his "Dao of Ink Landscapes." Because his "Dao of Ink Landscapes" were not just an extension of his brush and ink landscapes, but in particular were also expressive of the techniques he used in the snow and ice landscapes, they incorporated inner elements that made for unique modeling and captured the snow and ice landscapes' emphasis on expressing the artist's heartfelt sentiments. By means of expanding his thinking and restructuring and modifying the configuration of the paintings, moreover, Jizi sought to reproduce a painting that surpassed merely showing an image.

4. Regarding a Theoretical Explanation of the Dao of Ink Landscapes

Jizi's artistic form, known as the Dao of ink landscapes, is an experiment to use painting to embody the Dao, and to materialize the realm of the Dao. We can explain the theory behind this by dividing it into three parts.

The first part of the theory is the concept of the Dao of ink landscapes.

As an artist who devoted himself to Chinese landscape painting, how did Jizi think about and conceptualize embarking on the exploratory journey that led to the Dao of ink landscapes? First, Jizi acutely understood the transcendent spiritual essence of Chinese traditional painting. He carried on the artistic thinking that started with the Tang artist Zong Bing of "purifying the mind to glimpse the Dao," and "purifying the mind to get the sense of an object." He reflected on the profound meaning of the highest realm that Chinese painting has always sought and determined that this highest realm was the cultural value of expressing the universal spirit of the Dao. Second, he adopted the exploratory mentality of "emptying the mind to concentrate entirely on one thing"[16] and devoted himself to studying China's ancient philosophies. From the different traditional schools of Chinese thought, Jizi absorbed cultural and spiritual nourishment. He intuited the transcendent realm of the Dao where "the Sage makes a thorough study of the beauty of the universe in order to understand the principles of things,"[17] and where "looking at the Dao, it has no shape; listening to the Dao, it has no sound; even when discussing the Dao with others, the Dao remains obscure."[18] Third, Jizi examined the difficulties

[15] The quote is from Chap. 16 of Laozi's "The Way and Its Power" (*Daode jing*).

[16] A quote from the Confucian philosopher Xunzi (312–230 BCE).

[17] A quote from the Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi (369–286 BCE).

[18] A quote from the Daoist philosopher Laozi (604–531 BCE).

faced by modern human societies as they develop, and he noted trends in the West, including the scientific community's theories, that show respect for and a desire to return to China's ancient philosophies, especially Daoist philosophy. Jizi recognized that modern cultural development was necessarily a prophetic process of reversion from the West's analytical and oppositional thought, toward the East's integrative and harmonious thought, and this strengthened his confidence in his exploration of the Dao of ink landscapes.

The three points described above took Jizi on his journey to the Dao of ink landscapes finally led Jizi to reflect on, from a cultural macro-development aspect, the differences in Eastern and Western cultures such as form and realm, tradition and modernity, the physical and the metaphysical, transcendence and the unlimited, and a whole series of other such cultural and philosophical issues. This reflection led Jizi to intuit a philosophical insight: if the artist is to transcend the limitations of the realm of images, penetrate deeply the universal metaphysical spirit, and create a united image from the abstract, the concrete, and the mental images, then the artist paints neither realistic reproductions nor purely abstract forms. Rather, the artist paints an untitled musical style of an intuited realm that is majestic and awe inspiring.

By means of analyzing the course of development of Chinese painting and using the 1970s as the cutoff point, Jizi divided traditional Chinese painting into the two great structural periods of the classical and the modern traditions. From an overall point of view, however, these two periods, from the aspects of artistic realm and spirit, still possess an internal unity, namely "a sentimentalized poetic realm" of poetic emotions, qualities, and spheres that lacked a deeper, hidden meaning. The question then became "What is this deeper, hidden meaning?" Jizi replied that it must be "a philosophic poetic realm" and also "a profound humanistic realm" that is hidden in the philosophic or scientific humanism that lies behind the poetic sentiment. This then is the essence that Jizi wanted to display artistically (Jizi "A Discourse on the Dao of Ink").

The contemporary Chinese painter Pan Tianshou (1897–1971) put it this way: "Philosophy is the foundation of Chinese painting, and a painter must have a philosopher's head." Li Keran (1905–1989), another contemporary Chinese painter, also said similar things, while Chen Zizhuang (1913–1976) was even more rigorous when he said: "To paint, research philosophy; if a painter does not study philosophy, then a painter cannot rise up and will be forever stuck below." As a cultural phenomenon, the highest spirit of the art of painting, no matter whether East or West, is philosophy. As a Chinese painter, if one does not research China's ancient philosophy, then the result could be that the painter does not gain access to the Dao but rather only scratches the surface.

Jizi used the spirit of Chinese philosophy to inspire and proceed with his own explorations. Jizi said: "China's philosophy is China's philosophy of art." But Jizi differed from the ancients. First, although Chinese landscape painting has always had an indissoluble bond with Daoist thought, nevertheless, traditional landscape painting always focused on returning to nature and fully expressing woods and waters. The idyll of having only a mountain haze for a companion was a refined artistic realm whose major subjects were largely monks and scholars dwelling in the mountains as fishermen and firewood gatherers, while living in thatched huts in the wild among pines and running streams. These landscapes belonged to a category of a mountain and forest culture that paralleled the temple and court culture. But Jizi was different. He did not attempt to show this representation of quietude, but rather he went beyond the image to express the macro image of great turmoil, grand rapids, grand risings and fallings, and a great silence.

Second, traditional Chinese painting never broke away from a depiction of forests, because it saw trees as the essential feature of a landscape. Jizi, however, saw forests as superficial to landscapes and thought that only by stripping away the superficial would he be able to display Nature's essential spirit, truth and beauty. So Jizi's "Dao of Ink Landscapes" only capture images of lofty, craggy mountains, vast and mighty waters, fluctuating clouds, static and dynamic activity, and then proceed with a creative spirit to restructure and deform these images to achieve a material demonstration of a realm where the mind is enlightened by the Dao.

And third, traditional Chinese landscape painting emphasized using the rhythm of calligraphy to insinuate a principal, cosmic consciousness that can be described as being "as easy as cutting with a sharp knife and as harmonious as listening to the music of the Shang Dynasty."[19] Jizi, however, from the aspects of creating images and making forms, expressed as the principal part of his paintings a cosmic consciousness a realm where the mind is enlightened by the Dao. He does this in order to change a suggestion into something directly perceived by the senses and to materialize the realm of the Dao. This makes a strong contrast with previous artists and demonstrates Jizi's own cultural individuality. These three points then are the keys that unlock the door to understanding Jizi's "Dao of Ink Landscapes."

Speaking from the philosophic point of view, exploring the mysteries of the universe's cosmology that govern the myriad of things is just humanity's search for the highest rational objective, and it is the same regardless of whether we are discussing the East or the West. It is well known that the theme of classical philosophy is ontological research, while the theme of modern philosophy is epistemological research.

[19] A quote from the Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi.

Because the West's modern spirit of rationalism breached the darkness of the Middle Ages, it gradually established an epistemological system founded on sensory empiricism that led to the birth of scientific and industrial civilizations. Because it emanates from empiricism, however, philosophy's purpose became the exact knowledge of what we believe is knowable in the world. This progressed step by step to a negation of the self and ended with David Hume (1711–1776) and the unknowable, a journey that went from positivism to a rejection of a rejection of the metaphysical and a denial of humanity's search for the highest rationality. Although we cannot deny that positivism had real significance for denying classical dogmatism and promoting the scientific spirit, it did, however, block the road for human beings to explore the highest rationality, and we cannot overlook that fact that its passive results leveled and singularized the human spirit.

Just as scientific civilization was flourishing, the First World War broke out. The brutality of the war made people see that science was definitely not a panacea for this grim reality, and it also made people engage in profound self-reflection. In 1920, when Liang Qichao[20] (1873–1929) visited Europe, he heard people decrying that "it was regrettable that Western civilization was bankrupt," and Oswald Spengler's (1880–1936) "Decline of the West" was world famous. At that time, the French philosopher Boutreu (the teacher of Bergson) said to Liang Qichao: "I have recently read a few translated works of Chinese philosophy and I believe Chinese philosophy to be both profound and broad. It's too bad that I'm old and unable to study the Chinese language. I hope that the Chinese people will never lose this valuable possession."

Shortly after Liang returned to China, he discovered that 1920s China was in the midst of the famous debates over science and metaphysics.[21] These discussions clearly showed that although humanity cannot do without a scientific civilization, a scientific civilization alone is inadequate. With the coming of the twentieth century, the split between a humanist culture and a scientific civilization became a huge problem troubling humankind. For this reason, some knowledgeable people in Western scientific circles discovered Chinese philosophy, especially the significance and value of Daoist philosophy, for bridging the present opposing divisions between humanist and scientific cultures. These people wrote books explaining the significance, for the present, of combining the results of modern science with interpreting and exploring Daoist thought. They believe that "China is the foremost source of a scientific humanism," a spiritual wealth for mankind that has worldwide significance.

At a minimum, Daoist thought has two important points to make to modern society: first, with respect to epistemology, Daoism's nondogmatic spirit accords with science's empirical spirit and is beneficial to developing a scientific and democratic spirit; second, with respect to ontology, Daoism's spirit of harmonious development and the belief that "life never ceases and energy never ends" can replenish the West's conquest of and struggle with nature that has led to biases and inadequacies that have upset the relationship between nature and human beings. If we understand the significance of Jizi's Dao of ink landscapes in this sense, then it is not difficult to appreciate their profound cultural content and value for the present times. Jizi has said: "The 'Dao of Ink' theory tends toward having new scientific cultural ideas and returning the spirit of humanity to nature in order to better inherit and develop China's fine cultural tradition. In asking how I could develop innovation in ink brush painting so that 'by grasping the ancient Dao, we can control what exists today,' I put forward this theory and called it the 'Dao of Ink.'" And again: "We are Chinese artists who are not only the inheritors and creators of ink paintings but also artists who must propose art for the times." (Discussions of the Dao of Ink). This really is a cultural and philosophical way of thinking that spans the millennium.

The second part of the theory is the creation of the Dao of ink landscapes.

The special features of the process of creating the Dao of ink landscapes are Jizi's advocation of "establishing the image with the Dao," "seeking a method with the Dao," and "using painting to embody the Dao, and using the Dao to intuit painting."

First of all, knowledge of the Dao cannot derive from a direct sensual perception achieved via a logical method of successive inductions, but this knowledge rather comes from an unlimited awareness that, by means of an integrated intuition, "washes away the mysterious,"[22] and brings comprehension. For these reasons, this comprehension is quite different from the achievements of logic and can only be a kind of approximate identification that has different shades of gradation. It is precisely this kind of knowledge that is dubbed as irrational, but there are also many specialists in the sciences who propose correcting this misunderstanding. They believe that, in the process of scientific discovery, intuition does play a decisive role, and they see Einstein as a scientist who represents intuition. Einstein said: "To obtain the starting principles of induction, there was no logical road to follow; and the principles of induction were only achieved by that intuition that depends on a comprehension that resonates with experience." In his book "The New Daoists,"

[20] Liang Qichao, a scholar and reformer, was considered by many the most influential intellectual of his time.

[21] The 1920s debates in China over science (*ke xue*) and metaphysics (*xuan xue*) was one of the most important events in twentieth century Chinese philosophy and had as participants many of the leading Chinese intellectuals of the time. Cf Daniel W.Y. Kwok "*Scientism in Chinese Thought, 1900–1950,*" Yale University Press, 1965.

[22] A quote from the Daoist philosopher Laozi.

the contemporary scientist and researcher, Dong Guangbi, wrote: "I disagree with the view that holds that intuition is not rational. From my perspective, the forms or rationality go in proper order from low to high as logic, mathematics, experimentation, and intuition. Intuition is the highest form of rationality. It is higher than the rationality of logic, mathematics, and experimentation and, because it possesses the highest creative energy, it can comprehend the hardest things to comprehend such as 'the good'" (p. 130). And again: "Science must accept intuition as rational as only then will it result in 'the good'" (p. 131). It is for these reasons that I consider Jizi's creative spirit, that "uses intuition to seek the realm of the Dao in painting," to be completely rationalistic.

Next, with the Dao of ink landscapes, Jizi establishes images with the Dao, uses painting to embody the Dao, seeks a method with the Dao, and uses the Dao to intuit painting. The Dao, however, is a kind of shapeless, soundless, and transcendent ontological spirit; and this determines that, in displaying the Dao, it is not possible to have an intuitive frame of reference that can be pointed out. Rather, the display the display must be a creative realm of the mind that emanates from the painting. How to create a method involves questions of the mode of pondering during the creative process and even the corresponding issue of configuring the canvas for the painting. This is exactly changing a suggestion into an intuition, and is the key to the specific implementation of materializing the realm of the Dao. By means of many years of creative practice, Jizi summarized his own theory of creativity as: the theory of unlimited thinking about painting, and the method of the multidimensional perspective. An understanding of this creative theory will assist in a specific understanding of Jizi's Dao of ink landscape art.

As to this so-called unlimited thinking, Jizi also called it thinking about creating multidimensional images. The basic meaning is this: in order to adapt to a transcendent display, it is necessary to take the way of thinking about the limits of conventional space and expand this way of thinking toward a transcendent, unlimited space. This is needed in order to fully transfer the dynamism and creativity of human thinking and thereby form a sort of supra-conventional way of thinking about creating images. This then is unlimited thinking. Unlimited thinking encompasses conventional thinking factors, but primarily it is a further expansion of thinking to embrace intuitive, enlightened, and imaginative thinking, as well as mental images. To sum up, unlimited thinking greatly strengthens the factors of nonlogical thinking, because the Dao of ink landscapes collect the abstract, the concrete, and the mental images to make a whole. So it follows that unlimited thinking is, perforce, the intertwining of concrete and abstract thinking and the complementing of logical and nonlogical thinking. The overall spirit is, nonetheless, expression focused, that is to say it expands the universal spirit that is the core of art. If there were no expansion or transcendence of this kind of thinking, then the problem of creating images for the Dao of ink landscapes would remain unresolved, and the goal of using painting to embody the Dao unattained.

Establishing an image with the Dao is the internal basis for unlimited thinking; and the results of this thinking are inevitably implemented as a unique configuration of a painting. If it were otherwise, then using paintings to embody the Dao would just become an empty phrase. And this leads to seeking a method with the Dao—the creation of the multidimensional perspective. Unlimited thinking and the multidimensional perspective are the two mutual aspects of exterior and interior. The conventional mode of thinking deals with the expression of three-dimensional space. No matter whether it is the focused or the scattered perspective, neither of them has a visual sense of space that surpasses the conventional. If one wants to express a realm of unlimited spirit that transcends the conventional, visual sense of space, then, however, the conventional three-dimensional perspective will not do. For this reason, the multidimensional perspective came about and its basic meaning is this: break through the conventional ideas for expressing near and far, high and low, up and down, left and right. Instead, let the visual images on the painting appear as a sort of almost paradoxical spatial effect. Break through the conventional ideas of interior and exterior and of inner and outer. Instead, let the painting appear as a sort of interlocking of the interior and the exterior, so that the spatial effect is one where the exterior is the interior and the interior is the exterior. Break through the conventional ideas about objects and the realm of objects. Instead, let the painting appear as a sort of spatial effect where this is that and that is this, where great changes prevail, and where there is motion and transformation. Also, the multidimensional perspective uses the general momentum of three-dimensional space to control the whole painting, letting the visual images appear as the spatial effect of a macroscopic Dao returning to its origin.

To sum up, the creation of the Dao of ink landscapes went from creating the concept to conceiving the idea, from thinking about the image to creating the image. The process is completely rational. On the foundation of conventional, rational painting, it aims at showing the transcendence of the unlimited spiritual realm of the Dao. Just because it is like this, the Dao of ink landscapes, in their creation of shapes, necessarily use conventional, rational painting as the foundation on which to realize a transcendental expression.

When discussing the creative state of Chinese paintings, some commentators—basing themselves on the spirit of an artist "sitting cross-legged on the ground with his arms exposed, so intent on his painting that he and the material things around him become one, and man and Heaven unite"[23]

[23] A quotation from the Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi.

—summarize the creative state as that of an artist swaying like a drunkard and painting as if composing wild cursive calligraphy. This is certainly true of some artists. But if we examine traditional Chinese artistic creativity from the art works this creativity has produced, then we definitely cannot reduce all of these art works to the above described artistic state akin to drunkenness. The creative state that produced wild art works is only in accords with impromptu, free brushwork similar to the splashes of the manic, cursive calligraphy of Zhang Xu.[24] This is but one extreme that the traditional literati artists developed, and it was definitely not the mainstream of artistic manifestation.

If we look at the structure of the best work of the Four Masters of the Yuan Dynasty, and especially the best work of the "madman" Wang Meng (1308–1385), how could these works possibly be executed when the artists were drunk! If the artists did not carefully conceive them, did not rigorously use brush and ink to express them, then such quality artworks as Huang Gongwang's *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains* and *Cliffs in the Deep Forest* could not have been executed. Jizi's Dao of ink landscapes, from a creative state, are thoroughly and fully rationalistic. They not only require careful conception and composition beforehand but they also require rigorous brushwork to express and complete the rendering of the painting. During the creation of the concept for the Dao of ink landscapes, there was of course an internal element of the artist "so intent on his painting that he and the material things around him become one, and humanity and Heaven unite"; because if the artist did not have that type of component in his artwork, then it would have been impossible to realize the realm of the Dao. This, however, is merely a type of thinking used to advance to that realm. As to the thought process on how to express this realm artistically, that process cannot be a condition such as drunken madness. Jizi has said: "When I realize the realm (of Dao), what I am seeking is a state where Heaven and earth and humanity are one: a thorough realization of the Dao, things, and myself. When I am specifically creating an artwork, however, I am thoroughly clear, comprehensive, serious, and earnest." This statement further shows that Jizi's Dao of ink landscapes are rational paintings. What is different about them is that, on the foundation of conventional, rational painting, Jizi realizes the transcendental expression of a unique personality.

The third part of the theory are the artworks of the Dao of ink landscapes.

First of all, the Dao of ink landscapes have three aspects in common. The first aspect is a common tendency to have what is created in the image go beyond the image, so that the visual images of what seem like mountains are not mountains, what seem like streams are not streams, what seem like clouds are not clouds, what seem like waterfalls are not waterfalls, what seems like ice is not ice, and what seems like snow is not snow. The second aspect is the common features that are a unique artistic language. The strange forms that break through the arrangement of paintings in three-dimensional space and are a technique for expressing flexible restructuring, modifications and a unique personality. The third aspect is a common philosophy that uses philosophical transcendence as the foundation to strive for a realm beyond appearances. Philosophy is used to achieve a mode for expressing some ontological realm in order to realize the transcendental realm of the spirit of the Dao in the material universe. These three common aspects epitomize the gathering of the abstract, concrete, and mental images into a whole in order to realize what Jizi advocates as "the height of unification of the subjective and ontological spirits." The gathering of the three aspects is expressive of a great image, great beauty, and great music that are all seeking an aesthetic ideal that "unifies authenticity, goodness, and beauty."

Jizi's striving to explore the Dao of ink landscapes carried forward the rational spirit of traditional Chinese painting by advocating a realm where authenticity, goodness, and beauty are unified. This unification in the realm advocated inspires and influences the human soul; it causes people in their heart of hearts to attain a pure and sublime spirit. By means of his Dao of ink landscape artworks and their realm of noble solemnity, grand majesty, and profound loftiness, Jizi has thoroughly pointed to the high goal of enlightening humanity's soul.

Second, in specifically trying to fathom Jizi's artworks, we discover that in controlling the three common aspects mentioned above, there are three types of artistic formations that differ from each other. The first type of formation makes the reconstruction weak but the transformation relatively strong. Artworks in this category, because there is no strong overall composition, clearly demonstrate a continuum with Jizi's snow and ice landscapes. We can see in this formation Jizi's initial concepts of how to transcend the limits on displaying an image. The second type of formation emphasizes both reconstruction and transformation. Artworks in this category, because of both the magnitude of the transformation and the strength of the reconstruction, are far from reality, making even more prominent the feature of going beyond the image. The third type of formation is prominent reconstruction and weak transformation. In artworks of this type, because of weak transformation, some of the components seem to represent real scenes; but because of the strong overall reconstruction that also appears very strange, these artworks give a person an overall unforeseeable, mysterious feeling. Speaking specifically, how flexibly to grasp and use expressions of these three formations lies in the creative requirements of concept and realm. Form, after all, serves realm.

[24] Zhang Xu was a Tang Dynasty calligrapher who created his manic style of calligraphy when he was drunk.

Third and final, the Dao of ink landscape paintings break through the norms of traditional literati paintings in many aspects, and their expressive formations all possess creative features. For example, forgoing white for black constructions that highlight black is a formation that breaks through the mode of traditional paintings where a large block of the painting is left blank. This effectively stresses the expressive power of black, overcomes the traditional artistic formation that favors emptiness in paintings, and is more appropriate for sensuously and effectively expressing such moods as stateliness, profundity, and mystery. Another example is the unique brush work and shading techniques that reveal the shades and textures of colors. This breaks through traditional calligraphy with its harmonic style of brush and ink, where the brush is primary and the ink secondary, the colors do not conceal the brush strokes, and the ink does not lose the brush. In Jizi's unique brush work and shading techniques, the brush strokes show shades and textures of colors, and the shades and textures of colors show the brush strokes, effectively bringing into play the expressive function of the ink that, for fashioning stately and rugged mountain like agglomerations, provides an assurance that these agglomerations are expressed. At the same time, however, Jizi's brush and ink style remains that of a sophisticated artist. As another example, in order to give play to the expressive function of colors, the artist breaks through the traditional style of light reds and pale coloring and strives to use the advantages of colors for creating an atmosphere and promoting the meaning that colors give to themes in Chinese paintings. In short, these explorations of Jizi were all undertaken for the artworks' purposes and the requirements of the artistic realm. These explorations all sought expressive forms that "get to the root to return to authenticity" and that show how "the Dao is rooted in authenticity," so what Jizi sought in these exploratory works was a type of natural and creative artistic language.

The *Book of Changes* says: "Because the ideal person is civilized, and responds to others with justice, thus the ideal person is upright and capable of realizing lofty ideals."[25] Is not Jizi just such an ideal person?

[25] The quote is from the commentary under the Tong Ren hexagram in *The Book of Changes*. *Junzi*, translated here as the "ideal person," is often translated literally as the "princely person" and, in contrast to the "mean person" (*xiao ren*), represents the Confucian humanist ideal.

The Seething World of Jizi's Paintings—As viewed on a Macintosh Computer in a Manhattan Apartment on Riverside Drive

Arthur C. Danto
2009

As a general rule, I do not review an exhibition based on photographs of the works on view. I was once asked to write about a show of the great Venetian master, Paulo Veronese, which was to be installed in our National Gallery in Washington. But the magazine wanted the review to appear when the show was up, which would mean that I would have to review paintings that were not even in the country yet. The editor said that they could give me transparencies of everything, and I could work from those. Months after I wrote the review, I went to the opening of the show. I realized the moment I entered that I would have written very differently, had I done so on the basis of the paintings rather than their photographic reproductions. I would have written about the glory of the paint, of which the photographs could have given me no idea. Veronese was obsessed with the gorgeousness of life, beginning with the flesh and skin and hair of beautiful women. My review was quite different. Years later, I read a letter by John Ruskin to his father, in which he describes how a painting by Veronese in the Municipal Museum in Turin changed his entire view of God and the universe.

But all I know of the paintings of Jizi is what I have seen on the screen of my laptop. Some of Jizi's paintings are somewhat in the traditional style of Chinese ink landscape, but they do not look like the quiet meditative scrolls that I have seen in the Metropolitan Museum's collections, where small figures are depicted standing by rivers and even by waterfalls, in clearings in dark forests of pine trees, with clouds, and perhaps patches of mist. By sheer coincidence, I started to write this on the anniversary of the great earthquake in Sichuan Province last year. I wondered if those who built those devastated villages were reassured by those beautiful paintings of the beneficence of the ground under their feet. Let's build our homes here in this quiet landscape, amid soaring peaks and waters falling through groves of evergreens! One wonders if they ever thought of the landscapes they were surrounded by as capable of shaking, opening up like the jaws of giant serpents, swallowing children they shook like apples out of trees, causing them to tumble into darkness.

Jizi's hills seeth and tremble like troubled waters. One feels that mighty dragons lie in troubled sleep. When they do wake up, and stand on their heavy legs, the ground above them will split, and chasms will open up. Art betrayed the people who built those villages, seeing nature as calm and reassuring, scenes to write poems in, or philosophical disquisitions on the goodness of the Dao. In Jizi's paintings, it is as if the winds lash the grasses as they howl. The grasses hold onto their place by roots that run deep into the rocky soil. There is no ultimate difference between grounds and water, sea and soil. The whole world is hostile to our dreams of peace and poetry.

I began to open up, one at a time, the little windows in which attachments to a text are found. It is a slow, and for me, a somewhat tedious process, but when the attachments are images, there is often a surprise behind them. I had not anticipated the shift from landscapes to what a crude sensibility would call "abstractions." My sense is that these have the same feeling of wildness and almost savagery that the landscapes have. In a way, I felt that these show what lies underground, what, if we were to dig deeply into the earth, we would discover, like caves and chasms. Or what we might see if we were to crack open a geode, and discover a little world, no less savage than the landscapes insinuate.

I began to think, as I opened window after window, of a famous poem by a nineteenth century visionary poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge. It must exist in a Chinese translation. Its title is *Kubla Khan,* and its subtitle is: *A Vision in a Dream; a Fragment*. Coleridge had this dream as the result of smoking opium. It is a fragment, because he was awakened by a visitor, knocking at the door. It tore him from his dream. Here are the first few lines:

> In Xanadu
> Did Kubla Khan
> A stately pleasure dome decree,
> Where Alph the sacred river ran,
> In Caverns measureless to Man,
> Down to a sunless sea,

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The poem then describes the great gardens, "with forests ancient as the hills, Enfolding sunny spot of greenery." But then, as if we were tracking the great underground river, running through caves, where rocks fly through the air—"Huge fragments vaulted."

Jizi's landscapes remind me of the wildness of Coleridge's description of seething water, vast rocky domes, and fragments of dislocated stone, dancing and crashing into the underground sea.

I have to wonder whether this impression of dreams and fragments, rocks and waters, would survive, were I to see these works, or is this just an illusion due to electronic transmission, and the actual touch and brush of the paintings actually a convey a whole different world?

Jizi: A Bridge Between Chinese Traditional Art and the Present

Curtis L. Carter
June 21, 2009

Today, the faces of Chinese contemporary art appear in many forms. Perhaps most familiar in Western circles at this moment are the theatrical caricatures of the Buddha's smile as in the works of Yue Minjun which first emerged in the 1990s, and the political renderings of Mao Zedong, for example Dong Xiwen's painting "Mao Declaring the People's Republic from Tiananmen" (revised ca. 1980). Yue Minjun's painting stretches beyond the roots of tradition in search of a new artistic identity. His work leaves few traces to the literati of traditional Chinese art. The familiar images of Mao emerged during his lifetime and beyond, extending beyond the geographic and cultural boundaries of China into the West through Andy Warhol's famous rendering of "Mao," (1972, 1973), mark his unique role in the political and social evolution of mid-twentieth century China. Again, the many different artists' renderings of Mao bear little relationship to traditional Chinese art, as they are grounded mainly in Chinese Social Realism or some form of Pop Art, with the possibility of connections to Chinese folk art traditions.

Jizi (1942–) belongs to a very different aspect of Chinese contemporary art that is fermenting quietly alongside other more flamboyant Western-driven approaches to art. He and others who chose to work in the medium of ink brush paintings are engaged in a search for meaningful connections between traditional philosophical and artistic means and the present day experience. This does not mean simply painting in the manner of previous masters. Rather Jizi's paintings achieve their own sense of originality through experimentation with renderings of pictorial space, varied ink colorations, and brush strokes. His medium is brush and ink painting, or some variation in the form of constructions.

I first became acquainted with Jizi's paintings during a visit to his studio in November, 2007 during a visit to Beijing to lecture at Beijing International University, the Central Academy of Fine Art, Beijing University, and the China Academy of Social Sciences. In my first impressions of Jizi's paintings, I experienced a powerful sense of visual energy, driven by the formal rigor and expressive force of the masterful hand of a gifted artist. Dark inks carefully layered to evoke spatial patterns marked by energized shapes, subtle tones of black to gray to white, and with occasional daubs of reds and blues giving a sense of visual and psychological order to the painting surfaces. Most impressive in his paintings is the extraordinary depth of space with multiple layers of intensity. The images can only be read imaginatively, as they are not representational works based on any real world events or objects, but products of the imagination, intended to activate in turn the imagination of the viewers.

The ink brush paintings of Jizi are thus mainly based on inner feelings or ideas rather than observations of actual scenes of nature, as is the case with traditional Chinese landscape art. His images evoke visual sensations that function to transfer the rhythmic patterns endowed in the painting's surfaces to the mind of the viewer. In the course of contemplating these works, it is possible to imagine the free forms as wind driven clouds, mountains, streams of flowing water, or the clashing of rock formations that might generate powerful disruptions of the underworld. However, it is not out of the question to find, in his compositions, occasional symbolic architectural forms, or even symbolic animal figures placed quixotically in the midst of swirling abstract forms. One can even imagine the eye of a monster figure in some of the works. However, the main point is to experience the works as visual meditations with deeply spiritual and intellectual connotations grounded most likely in a philosophical understanding of Daoism.

Like many other artists of his generation, Jizi had to work through the challenges of the Cultural Revolution, which deprived him of the opportunity for a formal education in art. His education in art was acquired by persistence toward mastery of the brush and ink medium through unrelenting practice. His practice was augmented by diligent self-study, reading books on art, consulting with other artists, and observing master paintings in the museums and galleries of Beijing. All of this while working at various jobs including carpentry and designing art and craft works. Since the 1980s, he has devoted full time to his art.

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Where do the paintings of Jizi fit into the larger picture of contemporary Chinese art? He belongs to a mainstream movement in Chinese contemporary art concerned with what constitutes Chinese painting, and ultimately, what constitutes contemporary ink painting (Pi Daojian). The debate takes place in reference to both traditional ideas with respect to this medium and the influences of modern theories of abstraction and expression. This tradition persists despite the fact that the material medium of ink painting itself is quite modest when compared with the complex formats of the media arts of today. Essentially, "Ink painting in a narrow sense means literally painting with ink and brush, but in a broader sense it means black on white, painting of monochromatic palette" (G. Y. Wu). Its success depends almost entirely on the philosophical and aesthetic understanding and skills possessed by the individual artist. These artists who choose to practice ink brush painting share a desire to create art that is grounded in the cultural traditions of China, while establishing meaningful symbols for life in the new China of today.

The importance of brush and ink paintings in Chinese contemporary art is attested to by the fact that leading artists of today are involved in the practice. Among these are Wenda Gu and Xu Bing. Wenda Gu coauthored a book on Chinese ink painting in the twenty-first century published by Shanghai Fine Arts Press. Both artists have participated in exhibitions featuring ink and brush paintings.

The current interest has generated a series of exhibitions devoted to contemporary ink and brush painting. These efforts, to extend the artistic possibilities for brush and ink into contemporary art, have been documented in numerous recent exhibitions including the exhibition, "Brush and Ink: the Chinese Art of Writing," at the Metropolitan Museum of art in New York (2007), "Contemporary Art in Evolution" organized by BJMOCA, Beijing, with venues at Harvard University (2008, 2009) in the USA, and "Ink Not Ink," organized by the Shenzhen Art Museum and presented at Drexel University in Philadelphia, USA in 2009. Numerous exhibitions on this subject have taken place in China and elsewhere. The exhibition of Jizi's brush ink paintings opening in Beijing's 798 Art Space (June 2009) joins the ongoing discourse to establish the importance of brush and ink painting in the contemporary art world of China.

The Benevolent Person is Boundless, His Artworks Impressive and Natural—A Discussion of the Essentials of Jizi's Paintings

Deng Feng

When I first got to know Mr. Jizi (Wang Yunshan), I was moved by his broad mindedness and compassion (*ren*).[26]After viewing his paintings, I felt that both their "uninhibited spirit" and their ability to "carry the 'Dao'" were equally important. By spirit here I mean the talent aroused in artists since ancient times by mountains, rivers, and the universe, not the impromptu and leisurely images of the literati, nor the escapades and self amusement of those who merely play with brush and ink. By "Dao" here I mean both "the Dao of Heaven and Earth," and also the Dao that molds character. Even if a painting does not have people in it, still that painting pulsates with human strength. This strength is externalized as natural landscapes, some of which are desolate, some are wild, and some magnificent. These paintings construct a world of landscapes that are sublime and also slightly tragic, and so mysterious that they cause people to meditate on them.

Jizi lived beyond the Great Wall at the foot of Mt. Yan. For several decades he was steeped in a bold and broad environment of mountains and rivers. His remarkable landscape creations have reached new heights in the cultural spirit and main body of Chinese art, a cause for both admiration and surprise. I visited Jizi's apartment in Beijing several times and was always moved by his artistic dedication, and I admired the delightful vitality and vast spirit of his paintings.

As early as the Northern and Southern Dynasties, Zong Bing had already theorized that: "Sages use their own intelligence and wisdom to realize the Dao; worthies clarify their minds to savor artistic images that emerge from the Dao; in this way, both sages and worthies comprehend the Dao. Landscape painting uses forms to adorn and embody the Dao, allowing the benevolent (*ren*) to rejoice at finding enlightenment among landscapes."[27] From the beginning, traditional landscape painting based the viewpoint for its value judgments on this metaphysical quest for the Dao. Thus "forms" adorned the Dao, and were physical signs of the Dao that provided pleasure to viewers. Because the Dao is abstract and primeval, and due to the constraints of the cultural position of "adorning the Dao," the forms of traditional landscape painting, on the basis of maintaining a certain degree of identity, had the artists using accrued combinations of brush and ink symbols: a subjective, virtual space–time continuum, fixed drawings, stylized techniques, and an orientation toward relatively constant artistic values—all of which became the significant features of traditional landscape painting. These limits and constraints assured the completeness and purity of the traditional landscape painting system and allowed the ancients in the midst of their ability "to model mountains and mold rivers," to describe "the unaffected spirit in their bosoms," and in the realm of "going beyond the image" to embody their intuition of the Dao. Nevertheless, this relatively mature system also presented a relatively rigid visual language.[28] How to breakthrough this paradox was not only an internal requirement in the historical development of traditional landscape painting, but also an issue that is now even more urgent in the face of Western culture's impact on and penetration into Chinese culture in the contemporary and modern periods.

In the more than 50 years that Jizi, who will soon be 70 years of age, has pursued the arts seeking the Dao, he has deeply felt the anxieties of the present age and the anxieties and confusion in the development of art. He uses benevolence (*ren*) as his foundation, nourishes his vast, flowing pas-

[26] *Ren*, which has a number of English translations including benevolence, humaneness, compassion, charity, love, and so on, is arguably the most important Confucian philosophical concept. Giving its philosophical import, the plethora of its English translations, and the fact that a given English translation seldom fits all contexts, the pinyin Romanized form "ren" follows the English translation in the text to inform the reader that the word translated is *ren*.

[27] Zong Bing (375–443) was the author of a "Preface to Landscape Painting" (*hua shanshui xu*) from which this quote derives. The translation is based on a modern exegesis given in *Lidai Hualun Heji*, http://www.eywedu.com/hualun/hl002.htm.

[28] The three phrases quoted in this sentence are attributed to the tenth century artists Dong Yuan and Ju Ran of the Jiang Nan School of Painting.

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sion nature,[29] and structures his philosophy from the "Dao" of heaven, earth, and humanity. As the poet said: "The vast, flowing passion nature is just the sense of righteousness that exists in the world. What this sense of righteousness confers on humanity is a highly integrated sense of truth, goodness, and beauty, and of the noble, tragic, strong, upright, and serene."[30] The artworks of artists are the products of the artists taking an action (*youwei*), but their artworks should also embody a spirit of taking no action (*wuwei*). Taking no action is the spirit of the universe, the spirit of the great Dao.[31] Artists are not only to understand the harmony among heaven, earth, and humanity but also are proponents of this harmony, while at the same time they seek a cosmic consciousness. Jizi strictly grasps this type of artistic seeking: his artworks are concrete manifestations and he bears responsibility in this seeking for a cosmic consciousness. For this reason he named his landscapes the Dao of ink landscapes. From the following quote from Jizi, we can see his self-disciplined pursuit of this goal: "Viewing my paintings is not a cheerfully pleasant experience, a relaxing pastime, nor an experience that experts on traditional and orthodox brush and ink paintings relish, but rather an experience for those who can exchange serious ideas on all aspects of the artworks. My paintings are not the brush and ink works that the literati delighted in painting, they are not poetic paintings, and they are not paintings that play with ink, or that joyfully satisfy the artist's wish to express his carefree spirit like all those paintings of mountains and recluses. My paintings do not have spiraling smoke, drizzling rain, floating boats, weeping willows, dripping ducks, matching pairs of Mandarin ducks, or 'Ladies Among the Plantain Trees.'[32] What my paintings set out to do is express the endless movements, tenacious struggles and rivalries, and the loud screams of life in the universe. I strive to use my artistic language to wash away humanity's depressions and troubles, and to seek the true meaning of life in the universe."

The goal of artistic language is producing a mode of expression about art, rather than the purposeful expression of art. The fundamentals of this artistic language determine what is being described and how it is being described. The traditional art of the East and the West shows that each has its own artistic language system; nevertheless, we can see, among the differences, a consistent pursuit of the artistic spirit. Jizi's landscape paintings use just such a historical view, a sense of the times, and a strong sense of purpose to perfect his own artistic language. He does this not only to penetrate the vertical image sequence in the language of traditional landscape painting but also to carry out a horizontal dissection of Western art, so that in making decisions about the vertical and the horizontal image sequences, the artist opens up a new realm for his own paintings' features and figures.

The Dao Inspires Creation of the Image: Mind is the Source for Creating the Artistic Realm

The image is the basis for the visual arts, and different landscape images present different artistic interests and realms. In his "Discourse on the Northern and Southern Schools," Dong Qichang emphasized a "plain and innocent" literati aesthetic and, by stressing the independent nature of ink and brush paintings, Dong "restricted the Northern School and raised the Southern School."[33] At the same time that Dong was developing the literati style of brush and ink painting, he was also forfeiting the true beauty of landscape painting. By insisting on using similar graphic modes and following the same painting routine, Dong in effect waylaid creative use of the brush. The Northern and the Southern Schools have their differences, something already evident from the earliest development of landscape painting. But does this initial basing of landscape painting on creative accomplishments and on the different natural conditions of different landscape features allow us to say that the Northern School led by Jing Hao and Guan Tong was either inferior or superior to the Southern School established by Dong Yuan and Ju Ran?[34] This type of differentiation is rather really meaningless. Northern places produce a bold people while southerners are more gentle, and differences in aesthetic orientation alone do not allow us to directly declare one superior and the other inferior. Jizi was born in the North and was raised amidst northern lands and waters. All of his landscape paintings—no matter whether his Snow and Ice Landscapes, his Dao of ink landscapes, or his later landscapes of self structured scenes that permeate the cosmic consciousness—all these landscape paintings have their origins in Northern landscapes. Of course, an in-

[29] "Vast, flowing passion nature" (*haoran zhi qi*) is a Confucian philosophical concept developed by Confucius' most famous disciple Mencius (*Mengzi*). Cf. *The Book of Mencius*.

[30] The quote is from the Southern Song Dynasty poet Tian Wenxiang's (1236–1283) *Zhengqi Ge* (*Song of Righteousness*).

[31] "Taking no action" (*wuwei*), in contradistinction to "taking action" (*youwei*), is a Daoist concept. Laozi says: "Nature takes no action (*wuwei*) but there is nothing left undone." Cf. Laozi, Chap. 37, *DaodeJing*.

[32] While all of these phrases describe elements of traditional landscape paintings, the last phrase "Ladies Among the Plantain Trees" is the title of a series of paintings done in 1942 by the traditionalist painter Zhang Daqian (1899–1983).

[33] Dong Qichang (1555–1663) was an influential Ming Dynasty painter, calligrapher, and critic who espoused a "Southern School" style of landscape painting in opposition to the style of the "Northern School."

[34] Jing Hao (circa 920 CE), Guan Tong (circa 906–960), Dong Yuan (circa 934–962), and Ju Ran (no dates) were all landscape painters during the Five Dynasties Period (907–960).

dividual's encounters in life are external factors, Jizi's inner drive comes from "finding the source for paintings in one's mind" as well as a cultural knowledge powerful enough to penetrate history.[35]

Jizi has astutely grasped the transcendent spiritual essence of traditional painting. He has inherited the ideology of "purifying the mind to glimpse the Dao," and "purifying the mind to get the sense of an object."[36] He has thought deeply about what after all is the highest realm that Chinese painting wants to attain. He has drawn cultural and spiritual nourishment from Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, and realized that transcendent realm of the Dao where "the sages trace out the beauty of the universe and comprehend the myriad of things in the universe;"[37] where "great images have no forms" and "great music uses sound sparingly."[38] He realized the realm where "looking for it, there is no form; listening for it, there is no sound; and men who discuss it find it abstruse."[39] Jizi has taken the narrow definition of Dao and extended it, endowing it with the vitality of the times. He collectively designates the Confucian, Daoist, and Chan Buddhist spirits as "the spirit of the great Dao." This spirit of the great Dao is not only the organic content of personal cultivation, but also the projection of one's sentiments onto nature, both of which ultimately emerge as images that transcend nature.

In the "Snow and Ice Landscapes" of his early period, Jizi primarily took Tibet's majestic and sacred mountains and rivers, as well as the Yanshan mountain range both within and without the Great Wall, as his themes. After these themes underwent subjective cropping, they metamorphosed into scenes of universal significance and broad grandeur. Among these are scenes of traditional Tibetan temples and the meandering Great Wall, manifestations of humanity's own strength that are also the pictures' visual centers. With the undulating, mighty mountains as the central subject, the magnificent towering mountains, surrounded by clouds that surge and billow, provide a counter force to the buildings on the towering, motionless mountain peaks and to the great tension that lies hidden inside these mountains. The solemn and sacred snow mountains that are deep and secretive change into varied clouds and mists, while the deep and solemn temples, the thick and dull Lama trombones, the strong religious atmosphere, the broad and intensive folk customs—these kinds of wonderful, natural scenery and mysterious and ancient cultural landscapes are a profound cultural heritage symbolizing for humanity an eternal allure that is charming and mysterious. "The Dao of Ink Landscapes" and the later new compositions that permeate the cosmic consciousness have both advanced the refinement of scenes depicting mountains and rivers that transcend a space–time continuum. These landscape paintings have images that not only appear to be ancient caves but also some kind of unknown outer space where various types of mountainous forms interlock, extrude, and mutually overlap with round forms to create a multi-dimensional imagery that possesses strong symbolic significance. Just as Jizi himself has said: "In my explorations of landscape painting, the landscapes in the paintings are not composed of mountains that one can see in the natural world with one's own eyes, nor are they reproductions of the imitated, decorated, and scenic natural mountains in other landscape paintings. Rather, the landscapes in my paintings are symbols that as much as possible signify art. I borrow these symbols to express a deep awareness of my primary ideas so that this deep awareness, by means of the objects in the paintings, can as much as possible overflow with intuitive understanding." Jizi has taken the state of mind where "Heaven and humanity are one," a state of mind that exists in the traditional landscape creative process. By means of intuitive comprehension, he has visually expressed this state of mind in the paintings, painting it as visual, aesthetic objects. These traces of the realm of the Dao give people a sense of the mysterious, the sublime, the tragic, and the sacred. The paintings' great tension and broad realms give people a spiritual shock that seems to be a kind of transcendental purification of their souls.

Partial Remodeling and Total Reconstruction

Delineation, light ink strokes, rubbing, spotting, and staining are all basic brush and ink strokes and methods of artistic expression in traditional landscape painting.[40] Some painters, based on their painting process, use these methods independently, while other painters apply them flexibly. As for displaying mountain rocks, most rocks have three tableaux: a rock is first delineated, then light ink strokes and

[35] "Finding the source for paintings in one's mind" is a famous quote from the seventh century Tang Dynasty painter Zhang Zao.

[36] These two quotes are from Zong Bing's (375–443) "Preface to Landscape Painting" (hua shanshui xu).

[37] This quote is from the "Knowledge Rambling in the North" Chapter of the *Book of Zhuangzi.*

[38] The two quotes "Great images have no forms, great music uses sound sparingly" are from Chap. 41 of Laozi's *Daodejing.*

[39] This quote is also from the "Knowledge Rambling in the North" Chapter of the *Book of Zhuangzi*. The "it" of course refers to the Dao.

[40] Delineation (*gou*) is a method for outlining the contours of an object, while light ink strokes (*cun*) refer to the method of showing the shades and textures of rocks, mountains, and trees using light ink strokes. Rubbing (*ca*) is a method of using the brush to paint pine trees, feathers, etc.; rubbing is used to complement delineation and light ink strokes in the transition to full ink. Dotting (*dian*) is used to show moss on rock, small plants on trees, or to indicate trees on distant mountains. Finally, staining (*ran*) is using a thin layer of ink to stain an object in the painting.

staining are used to distinguish lightness and darkness.[41] The brush strokes used for this were developed by painting different landscape topographies. Ultimately, the brush strokes become various types of stylized techniques. These stylized brush techniques have names such as: the axe swing stroke, the wrinkled stroke, the folded band stroke, the veins of the lotus leaf stroke, the horse teeth stroke, the dense dotting stroke, and so on.[42] In fact, the artists used lines as units and either shortened the lines to dots or extended them for a tableau. These then became a collection of three different brush strokes: the line, the dot, and the tableau. Due to his unique way of creating images, Jizi used the brush, in connection with traditional landscape painting's display of snow and ice, to produce weak, pale spots. He created unique brush techniques such as the coarse snow stroke, the split snow stroke, the wrap around snow stroke, the nest of snow stroke, and so on. These brush stroke techniques embodied the use of the tableau as the basic creative unit; within the tableau, lines appear that are agile and that use ink in interesting ways. These brush stroke techniques display the mottled changes in the textures of mountain rocks that are quite consistent with the modern aesthetic vision. The textual relationship among tableaux utilizes certain shading techniques that not only have a segmental sense of weight but also coincide with the overlapping method brought about by the layered changes that traditional landscape painting used to display the shaded (*yin*) and lighted (*yang*) aspects of mountain rocks. The panoramic landscapes of the Northern Song not only emphasized "having the painting show its essence when viewed close up," by which they meant pursuing a subtle view of local mountain rocks that embodies the physics involved, but they also emphasized "having the painting show its power when viewed from afar," that is, having the imposing manner of the whole painting radiate the timeless Dao of landscape painting.[43] Jizi fully absorbed the Song landscape artists concepts of artistic rules and reasons.[44] On the ample basis of partial remodeling, Jizi uses great architecture throughout his landscape paintings in which the real and the theoretical are equal, the dynamic and the static participate equally, and the clouds that completely cover the painting wander among the mountains. Jizi frequently employs the layered accumulation of ink technique that can be used not only to drip ink thickly but also to apply white carefully to maintain an outer appearance of the immeasurable traces of clouds and mists. Jizi has obviously learned from the approach to clouds in Western landscape painting, while at the same time, in order to enhance contrast, he has grasped the sense of rhythm and excitement of the whole panorama. Jizi also cleverly utilizes the role of light: the blackest and whitest physical images are juxtaposed for contrast, highlighting the visual tension.

In composition, traditional landscape painting stressed arrangement and management so that it could give even more expression to, and derive more meaning from, a planar surface. Especially after the landscape paintings of the Northern and Southern Song Dynasties, however, the spatial sense gradually faded and exhausted. The method of the "three distances"[45] became even more independently applied, and one could no longer dwell or roam in the fascinating spaces of landscape painting. The lack of a visual sense could not, of course, shock a viewer's inner mind. In his "Dao of Ink Landscape Series," Jizi completely broke with the traditional stylized composition and advanced his restructuring of images to establish a deep and mysterious space that made people realize the reality of chaos and distress, and that led them into a holy land of the soul that is mysterious, distant, and profound. In order to expand the layout, broaden the scene, and comprehend the realm of the Dao, Jizi carried on the traditional scattered perspective method, which is also the foundation for a panorama, and created a perspective space of four or more dimensions that he named "the multi-dimensional perspective." He said: "The universe is extremely deep and profound, and its time and space have no location, no direction…. As much as possible, I expand an artwork's limits on the expression of forms, and I give expression to the artwork's unlimited spiritual sphere." At the same time, Jizi transformed the traditional relationship between the real and the false to counter the tradition of putting less emphasis on emptiness. He also mastered Western art's relationship

[41] That is the Yin (facing away from the sun) and the Yang (facing toward the sun) aspects of mountain rocks. Light ink strokes and staining are used to make changes in shading and to give an uneven sense of structure to mountain rocks.

[42] The Tang Dynasty artist Li Sixun created the axe swing stroke which takes its name from the brush being used boldly and resolutely, like swinging an axe. The Five Dynasties artist Dong Yuan created the wrinkled stroke, also known as the coarse skin stroke, that he used primarily to paint mountains and rocks. The folded band stroke creates lines that appear as a folded band of cloth. This brush stroke was a favorite of Ni Yulin, one of the Four Great Artists of the Yuan Dynasty. Artists used the veins of the lotus leaf stroke to paint the sides of peaks. The tip of the brush was bent to spread the ink in a disorderly fashion producing lines that resembled the veins of a lotus leaf, hence the name. In the horse teeth stroke, the brush was pressed down and then moved quickly horizontally. The resultant stroke resembled a horse's teeth. This stroke was a favorite of the Southern Song dynasty artist Ma Yuan and the Yuan Dynasty artist Huang Zijiu. The Song dynasty father and son artists Mi Fu and Mi Youren created the dense dotting stroke to show clouds and mists after an early morning rain in their Jiang Nan School landscape paintings.

[43] The two quotes in this sentence are from "Notes on Brush Methods" written by Jing Hao (circa 920) of the Five Dynasties Period.

[44] The Chinese term is *lifa*, literally "reasons and rules."

[45] The "three distances" was an artistic theory created by the Northern Song painter and theoretician Guo Xi (1000–1080) in his work *Linquan Gaozhi*. The three distances are: the level distance (drawing an extensive space both horizontally and laterally); the high distance (looking from the base of a mountain to the peak); and the deep distance (glimpsing other mountains from atop a mountain).

between the real and the false, thereby greatly strengthening the tension in his artworks. Fusing his paintings' black and white relationships and the optical effects, he boldly used black color that traditional landscape painting called "dead black," thereby reinforcing his paintings' overall feeling of depth.[46] At the same time, Jizi learned from factors used in plane surface compositions, such as apertures with mountain rocks overlapped and interspersed. His shading effects are as intangible as a time tunnel.

A Solemn Sublimity, An Illusional Brilliance

"My paintings are not the kind of paintings that stop once they have reached the level of providing the viewer with a pleasant mood or some character cultivation (although they often include these). Nor do I require that viewers completely understand my paintings. Instead, I only require that the initial feelings that people viewing my paintings have, by means of a first intuition, cause them to reflect rationally on the paintings and, by means of this reflection, come to their own understanding. I believe that this type of understanding, no matter the point of view, enables them to relate to the deepest layers of my mind. I strive to create the power to shock, and to impact and cleanse the viewer's soul." Jizi is extremely clear about the ultimate concerns and pursuits of his art. He sums up that "a philosophical realm of poetry" and "the height of a realm of the humanist spirit" are the profound philosophical thoughts that give his artworks a strong, spiritual penetrating power that moves peoples' souls in an almost religious manner.

Religion is a type of belief, and the greatest feature of religion is perhaps that it embodies a spirit of transcendence and purity. Jizi puts it well: "The universal spirit of art is not religion, but it has a religious ethos." His snow and ice landscapes depict a sacred atmosphere: the desolate, melancholy, and snowy plateau; the solitary yak walking alone; the towering, quiet temple; a cow's skull placed atop a rock for worship—all of these are concentrated expressions of misery and nobility, solemnity, and dignity that resound and resonate with humanity's cultural life and nature's spirit pointing to eternity. In Western paintings, light symbolizes the power of God, and God said: "I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth."[47] Chinese traditional art discarded this mode of outward manifestation, returning instead to a calm and self-adapting inner mind that in paintings produces a definite relationship between light and dark that is most definitely not Western painting's depiction of outer light but a much more subjective process. Western art's importance as a reference system in the twentieth century, however, squeezed into and pressed against the development of Chinese art, and a good many Chinese artists began to utilize light as a form of artistic expression. For example, Huang Binhong's agile use of "inner light," and Li Keran's sense of heavy backlighting provided a new broadening of traditional painting's morphological language.[48] Jizi's use of light has its own distinguishing features. One feature is his strategic use of shading when creating an image so that the shading increases the qualitative sense of partial segmentation, a use of light that we might call "silhouetted light." Another feature springs from overall consideration of the painting's composition where, in the reconstruction of the images, light is used as a boundary for form and to unify the rhythm and contrast of the entire painting surface, a use of light that we might call "inner structure light." The greatest characteristic of these two modes of using light is an "illusionary arrangement" where a holy brightness radiates from every place.

Confucius previously proposed this formula for self-cultivation: "Set your will on the Dao; be in accord with virtue; depend on benevolence (*ren*); take pleasure in the arts."[49] In Jizi's works, not only does art give pleasure, but art is also the best choice for carrying the Dao, for transmitting the Dao, and for embodying benevolence (*ren*). Art, in other words, is Jizi's whole life. "The noble-minded person, like Heaven itself, continues to advance with a lofty fortitude."[50] An energetic life has caused the art of Jizi, this benevolent (*ren*) person, to be free and boundless. The explosive force of his art will have lasting repercussions in the context of a long ago and remote Chinese art form, and especially in the overall pattern of the development of contemporary Chinese art. How China's traditional ink art should develop is an issue that presents a major cultural choice. Traditional art is most definitely not something that is fixed and unchanging; but how it should change and how to put the change into practice are difficult issues, and many artists have given a lifetime of effort to this issue of how best to change tradition. With regards to this issue, we can say that the creative artistic practices of Jizi's paintings have provided us with a good

[46] In his Reflections on Art, Jizi says: "There is a distinction in the black used in paintings between "real black" and "false black." Real black is the application of pure black. In false black, however, one can regularly see objects as false black has a certain transparency. When painting in the traditional categories, artists mostly avoided real black calling it "dead black," but I boldly enable "dead black," because it has certain functions in an artwork as a whole."

[47] The Bible, Book of Genesis 9:13.

[48] Huang Binhong (1865–1955) and Li Keran (1907–1989) were both modern landscape artists.

[49] This quote is from the Shuer Chapter of the *Analects* of Confucius.

[50] This quote is from the commentary on the Heaven (*qian*) trigram in *The Book of Changes.* The term translated as "noble-minded person" is *junzi*, literally "the princely person" who represents the Confucian humanist ideal.

case to research the transformations in contemporary Chinese ink art. Studying and viewing his art should provoke us to think deeply about Chinese art at this point in contemporary art history. That "a great talent takes time to mature" has always been a fascinating theme in the history of Chinese aesthetics.[51]

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Translated by E. F. Connelly, PhD

[51] This quote, *daqi wancheng*, from Chap. 41 of Laozi's *Daodejing*, literally means that "a great vessel will be long in completion."

The Creative Power of Ink Painting Revisited—On Jizi's Dao of Ink Paintings

Wang Chunchen

The spirit of ink paintings is forever set in the solidity of mountains.—Inscription

In the last century, Chinese ink painting encountered many challenges. These challenges and doubts, even concerning certain types of revolutionary themes, still show no signs of disappearing even today. For example, one judgment holds that Chinese ink paintings do not accord with the spirit of the times, and are, thus, incapable of reflecting the perceptions and experiences of people today. If we equate the creative ability of ink painting with the changes in society, we will recognize that ink painting is already missing on the art history horizon. This is one view. Another argument states that Chinese ink painting has undergone more than a thousand years of development, and there is no longer any depth or possibility left in it. All of the creative explorations that had to be made in ink painting have already been made by our predecessors. That is to say that there is no way today for us to surpass our predecessors in the forms of ink painting.

Under these circumstances, and based on modern or contemporary art theory, using ink for painting has raised questions of legitimacy. Although there are still a great many artists who continue to paint using ink, they make no contributions to the writing of art history or to the theories of art that elucidate art history. As a result, in the contemporary art scene and the impressions of the public, ink painting is no longer contemporary and no longer has contemporary value. For these reasons ink painting in the contemporary Chinese scene cuts an awkward figure. On the one hand, it is a bearer of Chinese culture, and some say that ink painting, although a strong transmitter of Chinese culture, nonetheless, in today's context, does not receive broad academic attention. But, if we merely remain in place as preservers or followers of the ancient style, that result will please no one; because the creativity of ink painting that we are discussing is not just amateurs playing with ink.

Well then, what is the possibility for ink painting to come up with something new, something that will allow ink painting to continue? Those who respond to this question employ different tactics. Some want to extend the ancient method and carefully scrutinize it in the hope of obtaining a truth of two from the intent of the ancient ink painters.[52] Others want to take a new path by exerting efforts in changing ink painting's mediums to allow ink painting to separate its medium from the load of cultural connotations that it bears. Some are searching the revolution in modern art forms for a brush and ink revolution in ink painting, while others talk about ink experimentations hoping to find a new road out. Still there are others who integrate European style painting methods in order to transform the language of ink painting at its base, and so on.

As for art in such a situation, only individuality will always have significance and value. Individuality is the visualization of special concepts. Individuality not only can bring with it the unfamiliarity of visual experiences, but it can also bring about an assault on our concepts. As for ink painting, how to extend the life of ink painting is not merely a matter of familiarity with brush and ink composition but rather a honing of an artistic realm. Ink painting must surpass being an amusement. Today's ink painting demands momentum and strength, audacity not delicacy. Painters must paint the imposing appearance of a great moral standard, and if Chinese ink painting is to revive its artistic vitality then we must strengthen that school of painters and that realm of magnificent paintings. Why did landscape paintings in the style of the Song painters become enduring classics? Why are these still the realm of painting for which people today long? Because in these paintings there is a type of restrained quality that made them so. Today, we must encourage or allow ink paintings to revive their original creativity and creative strength, and this requires heroic momentum and vigorous commitment. If we are to continue to write the history of China's ink paintings, then we must

[52] "Truth" here is *zhendi*, a Buddhist term that means the "genuine truth" of a sage or person of insight in contrast to sudi, the "vulgar truth," the truth of appearance, not reality.

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turn our attention to those artists who adhere to the development of the internal logic of ink paintings.

How to respond to the past hundred years of challenges to ink painting means seeing how far the new, creative ability of ink painting extends. In theory we can demonstrate the reasons for so much criticism, but practically we also have to grasp what is necessary to ensure that ink painting appears as a unique, viable art form.

The artist Jizi started to study and create Chinese landscape paintings from the end of the 1950s. He experienced the 1950s movement for realism in traditional Chinese painting, and he also experienced the 1980s modernist alterations to ink painting. Likewise, he closely followed the 1990s abrupt and reckless experimentation with ink paintings. Jizi confronted all these developments in ink painting, but he did not wish to duplicate a path or follow another but rather to struggle to paint with the features of his own artistic language. For several decades, Jizi immersed himself in independent explorations and inspired himself by quipping that "unless the paintings amaze people, I will not rest even after death,"[53] while he waited together with the fate of ink painting itself.

With regard to the controversies over the fate of brush and ink painting, over whether or not brush and ink painting has a tendency to return to the classical form, the heated debates about ink painting at present highlight its own cultural values, Jizi carefully examined and pondered these issues as they formed the foundation for the careers of artists who painted with ink. If an artist did not clearly comprehend and take a stand on these issues, then as an artist he would have no way to develop his own artistic pursuits. In light of this, Jizi called his own creations "the Dao of Ink Landscapes" with the intention of strengthening the meaning and spirit of landscape art. Jizi continued to use the East's unique vision in order to highlight his artistic individuality and to use today's visual experiences to deepen the potential of ink painting. At the same time, Jizi did not fall into the stereotypes of the original theories; instead, he made brush and ink the sole criterion for judging and pondered how best to allow ink paintings to express a certain kind of spirit. This spirit is forever set in the solidity of mountains; it allows the audience to come face to face with nature; and it brings forth a sympathetic response to the spirit of a culture. Jizi hoped that these natural environments would be imbued with intrinsic properties that were transcendental and that this would allow the audience to intuit a spiritual energy that derives from nature. Jizi was not simply painting landscapes that only had form and not content. For this reason we say that for Jizi "the Dao of Ink Landscapes" were explorations of "the Dao of ink painting," explorations of the issue of how today's ink paintings could extend and deepen their spiritual content.

From the aspect of artistic language, Jizi strove in his artwork drawings to break with traditional stylized compositions. On the one hand, he continued a portion of the traditional scattered perspective, while on the other hand, he combined many kinds of visual perspective relationships, allowing the layouts to expand and the scenes to broaden in order to change the traditional relationship between the abstract and the concrete. Jizi opposed the traditional de-emphasizing of the abstract, instead he merged it with western painting's connection of abstract to concrete in order to strengthen the artwork's surface tension and the printmaking effect of the black and white relationship, as well as its optical effect. Jizi also boldly uses "dead black,"[54] and uses the contrasts between patterns to strengthen the painting's overall feeling of depth. As to his artistic sign language, Jizi seeks the natural realm where "the great brush leaves no sign and that is its sign." Jizi often uses the "accumulation of black method:" Layers of stain accumulate so that depth is naturally achieved. These brush strokes are both born out of the classical language of ink painting and also are the results of Jizi's long years of practice. The paintings have no permanent, set method, but are the result of constantly pondering and boldly exploring. And only after this pondering and exploring could Jizi obtain his accumulated experiences and achievements in ink paintings.

Looking at landscape paintings from the perspective of an Easterner, I often instinctively associate landscapes with the cultural theory of "Heaven and humanity united."[55] As to whether or not landscape paintings possess this characteristic, or whether or not contemporary landscape paintings are capable of achieving this kind of artistic realm, this is quite doubtful; and we cannot assume that every brush and ink painting has this feature of "Heaven and humanity united." For this reason, when we use "Heaven and humanity united" to interpret contemporary Eastern ink paintings, we are caught in a vicious cycle where we take what should be the object of research and make it into a conclusion, and use that conclusion to cover a great many ink landscape paintings. On this point, Jizi's theme is not simply a matter of labeling, as he does not expect to use a language that is already empty and overused to describe his own artworks. On the contrary, in the view of contemporary Easterners, we need more understanding of and cultural thinking about nature and the environment. In other words, we should use contemporary knowledge and comprehension to regard the realm of paintings that are expressed via ink. Comprehension decides

[53] This sentence is a play on a famous line from the Tang Dynasty Poet Du Fu: "Unless the poems amaze people, I will not rest even after death."

[54] In his Reflections on Art, Jizi explains that, unlike what artists call "false black," "dead black" has no transparency whatsoever.

[55] "Heaven and humanity united" (*tian ren he yi*) is a Chinese philosophical principle common to both Confucianism and Daoism.

peoples' visual experience, and ink painting in the contemporary period requires comprehension and explanation. It is necessary, moreover, to use today's insight to penetrate the ontology and transcendence of paintings.

Jizi's revisiting the history of the creative power of ink painting is in-depth research, from ink painting mediums and cultural qualities, on ink painting's inherent viability. This research allows ink painting's historical context to expand continuously to new visual experiences and psychological responses, and it allows ink painting to shine with new opportunities for its creative power. Art develops freely but with restrictions, so that only by breaking through the accumulated restrictions of the history of ink painting are we able once again to promote the expressive power of ink painting. This is not only an important issue for ink painting but also a significant opportunity for the contemporary transformation of art.

Translated by E. F. Connelly, PhD

A Compilation of Jizi's Reflections on Art

Author: Jizi

1. I have named my paintings the "Dao of Ink Landscapes." The Dao is the spirit of the great universe. What I seek as an artist is the unification of Heaven and Earth and Humanity, insight into the Dao, the material universe, and myself.[56]

2. The artist's "awakening through meditation" and "intuiting the Dao" are not the ecstasy of religious believers, but rather an emphasis on choosing those cultural factors that accord with art and that inspire the artist to blend them with modern aesthetic concepts in order to create a new realm of artistic expression.[57]

3. "Attaining enlightenment by means of the *sutras,* and profoundly believing that all sentient beings have the Buddha nature," one does not "return to the delusions of a material world," but rather "casts away delusions and returns to truth."[58] One who returns to truth manifests an authentic mind.[59] An authentic mind gives rise to great truth, and great truth gives rise to authentic paintings.[60] Authentic paintings are spiritual paintings, and spiritual paintings attain the realm of the spirit.

4. Practitioners of Chan Buddhism say about meditation that "things viewed in the external illuminate the internal."[61] This is also true of painting the Dao.

5. If we use the mind to illuminate things, then things are transformed. If we just use our eyes to view things, then the things we see are not authentic. Things that are not authentic cannot be created because creations are things in one's mind. These things in one's mind are artworks. The Tang painter Zhang Zao said: "Learn about painting from nature's creations, but find the source for paintings in your mind."[62] If we only learn about painting but do not study nature's creations, then we impede both our eyes and our minds. If our eyes are impeded then our minds lack clarity. If our minds lack clarity, then our eyes will not be bright, and wisdom will not arise. A painting with no wisdom rarely captures the essence of its subject.

6. "Once the image is finished, the meaning appears; grasp the meaning and forget the image."[63] Once we forget the image, the authentic image appears. The authentic image is the artistic image, something that an image that is a mere instrument can never imitate.[64]

7. The paintings of a modern Chinese artist should have a forcefulness that is both daring and dynamic, and also have transcendental connotations that are unfathomable, unrestrained, and undogmatic.

[56] Dao, also Romanized as Dao, literally means "a road, a path, a way" and is the metaphysical principle of China's Daoist philosophy. "Universe" here is given as *qian* and *kun*, both of which are the names of the two lines, *qian* solid *kun* broken, used to form trigrams and hexagrams in China's ancient *Book of Changes (circa* third millennium BCE.). *Qian* and *kun* are also the names of the two trigrams that represent Heaven and Earth respectively in the *Book of Changes*; as such, *qian* and *kun* represent the universe.

[57] "Awakening through meditation" is *wu chan*. The Chinese terms *wu* and *chan* are more generally known in the West by their Japanese pronunciations "*sartori and zen*" respectively.

[58] The quoted remarks are attributed to Bodhidharma, the Indian Buddhist who lived *circa* the sixth century CE, and reputedly introduced the Chan (Japanese: Zen) or "sudden enlightenment" School of Buddhism to China.

[59] The word *xin*, which literally means "heart," is translated throughout as "mind" because, in the Chinese philosophical tradition, the "heart," regarded as the seat of consciousness, is the mind.

[60] The Chinese word *zhen* (真) can mean both "true" and "authentic."

[61] The term, *waiguan neizhao*, is a Buddhist expression used to explain how the Buddha, by inwardly reflecting on the external human condition, discovered the Four Noble Truths.

[62] The Tang Dynasty artist and scholar Zhang Zao lived in the seventh century.

[63] A quote attributed to the philosopher Wang Bi (226–249) in his commentary on China's *Book of Changes.* The second half of the quote can also be found in the "What Comes from Without" (*wai wu*) Chapter of *The Book of Zhuangzi.* Chinese scholars generally understand the quote to mean that the image is an instrument that allows us to grasp meaning, and that meaning is the goal for an artist creating an image.

[64] The word translated as "instrument" is *qi*, a word that means "instrument, device, or tool" and is used in *The Book of Changes* in sharp contradistinction to *dao* (i.e., the Dao).

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8. In my landscape paintings, the image means "an awareness of the image," which is also an awareness of the "Dao," an awareness of the universe. The image governs the impression in impressionistic artwork. The meaning of impression in the impressionistic is the microscopic. While the meaning of image connotes the creation of a macroscopic image, this image is not what is conventionally called impressionistic sketches. The former is the Dao; the latter, but an instrument.[65]

9. There is a distinction in the black used in paintings between "real black" and "false black." Real black is the application of pure black. In false black, however, one can regularly see objects as false black has a certain transparency. When painting in the traditional categories, artists mostly avoided real black calling it "dead-black"; but I boldly enable "dead black," because it has certain functions in an artwork as a whole. If, however, we simply paint black in isolation, it has absolutely no meaning and is simply a dash of dead ink.

10. The Dao uses technique as a means of expression, and technique itself connotes the spirit of the Dao. Because an artist uses "the great brush that leaves no traces," he composes a realm in which a great image has no form, great beauty has no adornment, and great music uses sound sparingly.[66] This demonstrates the spirit of a realm of images where "Heaven, earth, and humanity are one, and there is insight into the Dao, objects, and one' s self,"[67] a realm where the artist puts in front of the viewer indications of the Dao's universal spirit. Such an artist is not only the inheritor of that psychological understanding where "a pure mind gets a sense of the image and glimpses the Dao"[68] and the creative state where "the artist loosens his clothing and rolls up his sleeves,"[69] but also such an artist transcends rationalism so that the artist can develop the realm of the great Dao as a visual concept.

11. When I was creating the Dao of Ink Landscapes, I wanted to grasp and embody "the spirit of the whole" from a macroscopic level. On a microscopic level, I wanted to show "the qualities of objects." In other words, I was seeking mutual agreement between "a macroscopic exploration of the Dao, and a microscopic exploration of the real." The "Dao" indicates the universe's eternally unchanging natural spirit in operation. "Real" indicates the authentic qualities of physical images, and not the reality of the natural shapes that appear before one's eyes. If we want to assimilate the overall spirit of nature (the spirit of the universe), we must first have an "overall awareness," and this kind of overall awareness is just the spiritual realm that the artwork demonstrates when directly perceived through the visual sense. "The picture" constitutes the artistic realm, and "scenes" constitute the picture, so that scenes then are the most fundamental "sensual elements." Several "sensuous elements" compose the "overall awareness." When an artist is creating, he must fully comprehend his artwork from this aspect of "overall awareness;" otherwise, if the artist is constrained by a single "sensuous element," then he remains an artisan, not an artist. As to the microscopic, the artist wants to achieve the authenticity of the original object.

12. Although a painting is small, nevertheless, the artistic realm should be broad and deep, and painted in such a way that one "sees the universe on the tip of a hair, and can turn the great *dharma* wheel while occupying a molecule."[70]

13. If an artist wants to turn out an artwork that attains a high artistic realm and expresses a type of grand, broad, virile beauty, then that artist must "seek the source of truth," must "reflect and know oneself," must experience "the stillness and the silence," and "gain insight via random feelings."[71]

14. If in the end an artist does not dare to break down the mindset of experience, then ultimately the artist will never create a great artwork that astonishes people.

15. The traditional high walls and fixed barriers of experience restrain an artist's creative power. An artist must find that difficult and rare breach in these walls and barriers of experience. When the artist has found such a breach, he will be startled to discover that his potential is unlimited.

16. In discussing art, an artist should be introspective and enlightened; in wielding the brush, an artist must return to the original state of non-being.[72]

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[65] As noted above, this philosophic contradistinction between the Dao (*dao*) and an instrument (*qi*) is from *The Book of Changes*.

[66] The quote on beauty can be found in the last of the Outer Chapters, titled "Knowledge Rambling in the North," in the *Book of Zhuangzi*. The two quotes "Great images have no forms, great music uses sound sparingly" are from Chap. 41 of Laozi's *Daodejing*.

[67] The ideas expressed in this quote can be found in all three of China's indigenous philosophies: Confucianism, Daoism, and those Schools of Buddhism that are indigenous to China.

[68] The quote of a "pure mind getting a sense of the image" is from the artist Zong Bing (375–443), while "a pure mind glimpsing the Dao" is a Chan Buddhist statement that has been historically regarded as a statement of an aesthetic principle. Cf., Zong Baihua, "*Meixue Sanbu*" (*An Aesthetic Stroll*). Shanghai People's Publishing Company, 1981.

[69] This quote is from the *Tianzi Fang* Chapter of the *Book of Zhuangzi.*

[70] The quotation is from the Chan Buddhist work *Record of Pointing at the Moon* (*zhiyue lun),* compiled in 1602. "Universe" here is *shi-fang sha*, literally "places in all directions," while "turning the *dharma* wheel" (*zhuan falun*) literally means "enabling the truth of Buddhism." The *dharma* wheel, or the Wheel of the Law (Chinese: *falun*; Sanskrit: *dharma-chakra*), is an ancient Buddhist symbol and concept.

[71] The first two quotations, attributed to Shen Hui (670–762), a famous student of the Sixth Chan Patriarch Hui Neng (638–713), can be found in Shen Hui's *Xian Zong Ji* written in 733. The last two quotations are from the Later Han Dynasty work, *The Sutra of 42 Sections*, traditionally attributed to two monks from what is now Central Asia, Kasyapa Matanga and Dharmaratna, who translated the work into Chinese in *circa* the first century.

[72] That is, *wu*, the Daoist concept of nonbeing.

17. "(One who obtains the mysterious Dao) obtains it from within; he guards it against the external, and uses it to understand the spiritual; he remains oblivious to instruments."[73] These words essentially describe how the Jin Dynasty Daoist Baopu Zi thought about the Dao.[74] If an artist wants to create a "superb" artwork, this is the best formula.

Superb artworks inevitably "at first appear unfathomable, but over time become precious."[75]

18. Large scenes substantially painted evoke great interest, but small scenes in small paintings should also evoke great interest. What is of interest is the artistic realm. "The shape of the Lang Garden atop the Kun Lun Mountains can be enclosed in a painting of an inch, while a three inch vertical stroke can represent thousands of feet in height; and a few horizontal measures of ink can embody a trail of a hundred miles." (Zong Bing)[76] And: "A very small diagram can contain a scene of a thousand miles meandering before one's eyes in all directions." (Wang Wei)[77]

19. One needs a multi-spatial and multi-temporal stand point from which to look down on the universe, as this is what is meant by "seeing the overall plan."[78] This is not meant, however, to be a simple comparison from another perspective. but rather it is meant to be the summing up of art, the summing up of philosophy and science. When an artist uses the language of painting to express himself, then he must "cultivate the exquisite." This cultivating the exquisite, however, is not a matter of overelaborate formalities and superficial lines. While the great is simple, it is simple in a subtle way.

20. Great objects have no form; great beauty, no adornment; and great music uses sound sparingly. To express a great realm, then there must be a great space-time continuum, a great truth, a great principle of the Dao, and a great spirit of the universe. If such is the case, then the artist must pursue such corresponding requirements as: great brushwork, great ability with brush and ink, breadth of mind, mettle, self-cultivation, and worthiness. Without these, there can be no great undertaking. Instead, there will be: something made up; a small artistic realm of little interest; a great scene of little interest; narrow and shallow lines.

21. The Dao of Ink Landscapes were established as a new pattern in landscape paintings constructed via a consciousness of the great universe. From beginning to end these landscapes are penetrated by "greatness:" a great cultural background, great Chinese paintings, great brush and ink work, the great spirit of the Dao, a great energy, great mountains and waters, great fluctuations, great benevolence, great truth, goodness, and beauty, great humanity and justice, a great awe inspiring energy, great breadth of mind, great brushwork that leaves no traces, and a great elegance that appears inelegant.[79]

Because the Dao of Ink Landscapes were an exploration of a comprehensiveness, multiple perspectives, and newness in landscape painting, the requirement, premised on the new "orogenic engineering," to achieve these landscapes is a unique creativity that included: a new aesthetic realm, a new linguistic context, a new schematic structure, a new conception, a new image, a new mode for brush and ink, new visual effects, a new aesthetic orientation, and so forth. The Dao of Ink Landscapes established new concepts of space and time, the universe, aesthetics that strengthened both the tension on the canvas and the painting's power to shock. The Dao of Ink Landscapes had to be able to withstand viewers having a close look at distant views and their searching and pondering the landscapes. The Dao of Ink Landscapes also had to achieve a profound and harmonious unity of the subjective and ontological spirits.

22. The Dao of Ink Landscapes are transformations within and outward signs. "The myriad of things in the universe" are transformed within while the outward signs are "the spirit of transformations within."[80]

23. When painting landscapes, one should deliberately seek the spirit of life, and the real nature of this spirit. Prefer the grand to the the minute. Prefer the extraordinary to the tedious. Avoid what is real but soulless, what lives but has no spirit.

24. Painting requires ingenuity but not a blind ingenuity. Blind ingenuity is called cloyingly clever and is to be avoided. The ingenuity must be clumsy; and the clumsiness ingenious. One requires both great ingenuity and great

[73] The quote is from the Jin Dynasty (265–420) Daoist work *Baopu Zi* (literally "The Master who Embraces Simplicity") authored by the scholar Ge Hong (283–343). Again we see the philosophical contrast between the Dao (*dao*) and an instrument (*qi*).

[74] The *Baopu Zi* is generally considered a Daoist work although it also contains elements of Confucianism and Legalism.

[75] The quote is from the Tang Dynasty calligrapher Zhang Huainao (no dates).

[76] Zong Bing (375–443), a painter and calligrapher of the Northern and Southern Dynasties, authored *A Preface to Landscape Painting*, from which the quote derives. The "Lang Garden" was reputed to be the abode of immortals.

[77] Wang Wei (701–761), the Tang Dynasty scholar and poet, authored *The Secrets of Painting,* from which this quote is taken.

[78] The two quotes in this paragraph are from the famous fourteenth century Chinese novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and are generally considered the two different attitudes toward living and learning held by the novel's protagonists.

[79] The apparent contradictions in these phrases, such as brushwork that leaves no traces and elegance that seems inelegant, is typical of Daoist philosophic statements. Cf. *The Book of Zhuangzi*, "the usefulness of the useless."

[80] The terms "transformations within" (*neihua*) and "outward signs" (*waiji*) are Buddhist in origin. Cf. The Tang Dynasty work *Bianzheng Lun*, authored by the Monk Fa Lin.

clumsiness. Great ingenuity is like great clumsiness; and great clumsiness, ingenious.[81]

25. A painting must be both dynamic and tranquil: tranquilly dynamic, and dynamically tranquil. Great dynamism and great tranquility. Great dynamism is tranquil; and great tranquility is dynamic.

26. Change the real object into the subject, and turn the visual sense of reality into reality as seen by the soul. Go from the objective world to the subjective world by utilizing a type of transcendental subjective spirit to dominate physical reality. This is the key to transforming concrete reality into the abstract, it is the golden key as "the material world is changed by mind."[82] Although the real world (that is life) is the foundation of art, nonetheless, each artwork that has artistic value is definitely not obtained by a "mind changed by the material world."[83]

27. When the form of a physical image is changed, although it forfeits its significance as an object, nonetheless, it symbolizes the artist's expression of an inner mystery. Although unrestraint leads to exaggeration, and eccentricity produces abnormal forms, these are all different expressions of the artist's mind. When the special features of the physical image no longer exist, and colors also lose the effect of pure substance, then what emerges is a transformation in concepts. What the viewer feels is that the artist has completely exposed his inner mind. This is something about which the school of modern artists in the West has reached a fundamental consensus and, this being so, they use a special kind of painting language to convey the soul's artistic expressions.

28. A painting is speech. If the painting reveals one's mind, then that mind is "enlightened."[84]

29. The source of the mind is the source of art. One who 'gets' his mind is then capable of 'getting' the objects in his mind. The objects in one's mind are the objects of art. Art objects are nature's creative transformations. Nature transforms creatively.[85] Transforming creatively, however, does not mean transforming the ancient, objects, scenes, or art from outside (that is art from abroad), so how about "creating?"

30. If you follow the Dao to establish the image, then the image establishes itself. If you follow the Dao to seek an artistic method, then an artistic method arises by itself. If you follow the Dao to structure a scene, then the scene structures itself. If you follow the Dao to transform an artistic realm, then the realm itself comes into existence.[86]

Painting landscapes, the vulgar eye sees scenes but not realms. If there are both scenes and realms, the painter is competent. If there are no scenes but there are realms, Then the painter is a Master.

31. The scene is an instrument, the artistic realm is the Dao.[87] What is called the scene is not the scene; The non-scene is not the non-scene; it is the scene. What is called the realm is not the realm. The non-realm is not the non-realm; it is the realm. What is called the method is not the method. The non-method is not the non-method; it is the method.

32. Speaking from a macroscopic perspective (the universe reflects consciousness), the highest artistic realm is where culture expresses art. Speaking in a certain narrow sense (where art itself reflects consciousness), then art expresses culture.

33. Great music uses sound sparingly. Great images have no form. Great beauty has no adornment. But it is not that there is absolutely no sound, no form, no adornment. Rather, silence is not without sound; the formless is not without form; the unadorned is not without adornment; and this is the meaning of sound, form, and adornment. This kind of sound, form, and adornment are authentic truth, form, and adornment. If a painter does not thoroughly comprehend this principle, then that painter is a conventional artist painting conventional pictures.

34. A great brush leave no traces. No traces are not non-traces. There are the traces of creativity, of the real, of the original state; these are all traces. Traces are signs, signs that include: signs of the mind, the Dao, and the spirit.

Life—the artist—artworks (the eye). The artist—the cultivation of life—artworks (the mind). The universe—human life—art (the Dao)

35. From ancient times until the present, artists have persisted in the concept of "using forms to paint mysteries." I do just the opposite and "use mysteries to paint forms." "Using forms to paint mysteries" is reproducing the subject of the

[81] A typical Daoist contrast of opposites. The word translated above as "clumsy" is *zhuo* which literally means "clumsy, unskillful, poor."

[82] While the quote itself (Chinese: *wu sui xin zhuan*) is attributed to the Buddha in *The Lankavatara Sutra* (compiled in the fourth century CE), the philosophic idealism expressed in this quote is also a principle of the "Consciousness-only" School (*weishi lun*) that flourished in the Tang Dynasty.

[83] This quote, in Chinese xin sui wu zhuan, is the author's play on the words of the above quote: *xin sui wu zhuan* ("the material world is changed by mind").

[84] The Chinese word translated as "enlightened" is *fo* which literally means the Buddha; the original meaning of the word "Buddha," and its original Chinese transliteration *fotu*, however, was "the enlightened one."

[85] "Nature transforms creatively" is the author's play on the Chinese term: *zaohua,* which, as a noun, can mean Nature and, as a verb, to create or to nurture.

[86] The Chinese for "follow the Dao" is *yuan dao*, a term that also has the sense of "going along with the Dao,' 'being on the edge of the Dao,' and "because of the Dao."

[87] As noted above, the word translated as "instrument" is *qi*, a word that means "instrument, device, or tool." *Qi* is used in *The Book of Changes* in sharp contradistinction to *dao* (i.e., the Dao). Cf. Confucius' remark in the Second Chapter of the *Analects of Confucius* that "the princely person (i.e., the Confucian humanist ideal) is not a mere instrument (*qi*)."

painting while "using mysteries to paint forms" is an artistic expression. The former repeats the object; the latter, the subject. Laozi said: "Reversal is the movement of the Dao."[88]

36. Painting natural objects is a process where "objects move with the mind,"[89] "the earth transforms following mind," "appearances transform following mind," and "the material word is changed by mind." Painting natural objects is also a process of "re-creating according to mind."[90] It is a process of going from "the realm is created according to mind" and "mind is created in accord with the Dao," to "follow the Dao to establish the image," "the image is changed by mind," "the images of the scene constitute the scene," "the scene returns to the realm of images," and "the realm of images returns to the scene."

37. A landscape painting's qualities and the levels of its artistic realm are displayed in the following schematic: Materialized—'mindized'[91]—Daozied[92] Eye objects—mind object—Dao objects Indicates the material word—indicates mind—indicates the Dao

38. Does a painter want to know how good he is? Let him compare himself to others, and he will know at first glance. Is the painter thinking of becoming a Master? Then he must start as a conventional painter, spend several decades striving to cultivate himself and practicing his art, and only then will he achieve it.

Several basic processes produced the Dao of Ink Landscapes. The first step was to proceed to the macroscopic conception of "the realm of the Dao." The second step was to proceed to the overall painting's macroscopic composition based on the requirements of the realm of the Dao. The third step was to create the image based on the needs of that composition, the so called "laying hold of the Dao to create the image." As to the aspect of creating the image, I utilized a mode of thinking that allows for the creation of multidimensional images, sets of concrete images, abstract images, mental images, and so on. The fourth step was to paint a draft. In the draft, the painting should be guided by rationality but there should also be some irrational elements. There should be inevitable accidents, and accidental inevitabilities brought about by the learning and cultivating that is a convergence of artistic processes. This type of "bringing about" is unconscious, but there are also conscious elements so that "by doing nothing, nothing is not done."[93] China's spirit of the great Dao and the characteristics of China's nationalities are naturally embodied in this, and when we add individualized applications such as the relationships between brush and ink, false and real, complex and simple, black and white, and other such applications, then the the concrete artistic language "avails itself of the Dao to come into being and lays hold of the Dao to establish itself." In this there is a rational, meticulous creativity, and also some irrational randomness. There is a rationally transcendent epitome, but also the traditional unity of Heaven and humanity, a creative mood in which both the ego and objects are forgotten, and a state that transcends rationality in which "Heaven, humanity, and earth are one, and where the Dao, objects and the ego are fully comprehended." The fifth step was the last overall putting of things in order. From here, the Dao of Ink Landscapes are not just the traditional literati's "poetic paintings,"[94] but the poetic mind of Heaven and earth and also of the philosopher. The artworks are awe inspiring and majestic and touch people's heartstrings. They are a harmonious unity of the subjective and the ontological as well as the smooth assimilation of subject and object. They provide each individual with a different inspiration, and they are also the visual appearances of the spirit of the great Dao. They demonstrate that Chinese paintings strive for the highest spiritual realm and are not only a creative state of mind. More importantly, they are paintings of a realm directly perceived through the visual sense.

39. Chinese painting is one form of Chinese culture. Regardless of whether it is the past, present, or future, it is an inheritance that continues, by expansion and creation, to develop artistic forms that possess the cultural spirit of the people of China.[95] These forms of drawing follow the development of history and possess the spirit of the times of each historical period. This spirit of the times is frequently expressed in schematic representations that are expressions of forms; and some say that brush and ink paintings ought also to follow the times. What I want especially to stress here, however, is that, regardless of what historical period the artworks of the times represent, there is one main current that permeates them all, and that current is the significance is the spirit of the people of China that is the "the backdrop" to all

[88] Cf. Chap. 40 of Laozi's *Daodejing*.

[89] This quote is from the *Shishi Tongjian*, a work compiled by the Korean Monk known as Caoyi Chanshi (the Grass Cape Chan Monk), (1786–1866).

[90] These several quotes about how mind effects changes and transformations are typical of the philosophical idealism of such Buddhist schools of thought as Chan, "consciousnessonly,"etc.

[91] Literally 'mindized' (*xinhua*).

[92] Literally 'Taozied' (*daohua*).

[93] Cf. Chap. 37 of Laozi's *Daodejing*.

[94] An allusion to the Song Dynasty poet and painter Su Dongpo's (1037–1101) famous remark that "in a painting there is a poem; in a poem, a painting."

[95] The term translated as "people of China" is minzu, literally "a people, a nation, an ethnic community." Because China is a composite of many different peoples, however, and because the author clearly refers to all of these peoples, I have used "people of China" rather than "Chinese people," a term often mistakenly thought to refer only to the majority Han nationality.

these artworks. This current is the fundamental soul of the art of the people of China; it is their strength of character.[96]

A people that have experienced several thousand years, close to ten thousand years, of historical development are a people whose cultural spirit has formed ingrained monumental works. These monumental works, following historical developments, are an eclectic mix that synthesize humanity's advances in every historical period, and these advances have both strengthened and enriched this memorial. Simultaneously, other peoples have absorbed the cultural spirit of the people of China, consolidating even further the common pursuit of a human cultural spirit. Even if we engage in wishful thinking and use a utopian style of education, thought, and behavior to the point of making it mandatory to make changes to these monumental works, and even if we were to expend all our energies for several decades on this endeavor, ultimately we would have to admit defeat. We would be guilty of impeding the progress of history.

At the convergence of the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty first centuries, Chinese painting, which is one method of demonstrating the cultural spirit of the people of China, was criticized by some people who said that "brush and ink paintings amount to nothing," as well as by others who said "hold fast to the bottom line for brush and ink paintings." This confrontation sparked heated debate. In essence, paintings are nothing but the expressions of forms. I believe that the most important matter is to uphold the cultural spirit of the people of China and that to improve and enrich their strength of character is of the essence. As to whether Chinese painting "amounts to nothing" or whether we should "hold fast to the bottom line," both these aims serve the cultural spirit of the people of China.

40. Art is not philosophy, but art can answer some of the questions that philosophy raises. These answers are not graphic solutions, nor are they some kind of philosophic symbols; instead, they are a kind of extension of the philosophic spirit.

Artists must be deep thinking philosophers. Philosophers depend on language to expound their philosophical thinking. Artists depend on their own unique artistic schematic vocabulary to trace their own philosophical thinking; in other words, the deeper meaning of artworks.

41. Acknowledging that the highest realm of art exists is acknowledging that the highest principle of the universe exists. To deny this principle exists or to turn your back on this principle does not bring happiness to humanity but disaster. By means of artwork, an artist inspires and purifies people. An artist grasps the spirit of the existence of this principle of the universe and then artistically expresses this spirit of the universe.

42. Artistic realms have levels. Different levels of artistic realms reveal the different levels of an artist's philosophical thinking. Different levels of philosophical thinking are expressed as the artist's different artistic levels.

Artists are not the saviors of the world. They merely inspire people by upholding the "spiritual nature" that the universe has conferred on them. Humanity wants to free itself from the predicament it has created, but it also wants to be self-reliant. Artists are also people, and they also find themselves in the human predicament.

Before artists can inspire and arouse people, they must first inspire and arouse themselves; they must become people whose spirits are purified. For these reasons, artists must be people who possess a high degree of "awareness of the universe." At the least, they must be people who have extricated one foot from the morass that humanity has made. Artists' philosophical thinking relies on artworks for expression. After a long period of practice and exploration, artists are also able to use a written vocabulary to summarize theories of a certain academic value. These theories are not those passed from one book to another, but rather they are a summarization of repeatedly thinking about experiences that go from practice to theory, and then from theory to practice. For this reason, if we compare the theories of artists and the theories of theorists, the artists' theories are more practical. If we consider their linguistic ordering and logical aspects, however, the artists's theories are inferior. But their theories dazzle with far more artistic thinking.

43. In researching an artist's achievements, we primarily depend on the artist's artworks, but we should not forget the course of the artist's life and the artist's speeches and writings as these speeches and writings are a more direct statement of an artist's thinking.

44. Acknowledging the existence of the universe's highest principle is not the same as religious belief or worship, but it does have a religious sentiment.

45. The harmonious unification of subject and object is just the unity of humanity and Heaven. This is really what is meant by "the mountains and streams and I had a meeting of the minds and I turned them into art " (Shitao).[97] An artist who just reproduces the object is the slave of nature, and is "a person being transformed by scenery." An artist who uses the subjective to demonstrate the objective is a master of nature, and is "a person who transforms a scene." This is an artist who "gives birth to the mountains and streams" (Shitao).[98]

46. With regards to the transcendent nature of the unity of Heaven and humanity, the Buddhists refer to it as: Bhutata-

[96] The term is *jiliang*, literally "backbone" but by extension, and similar to its use in English, "strength of character."

[97] The quote is from Chapter Eight, the Chapter on Mountains and Streams, in Shitao's *Quotations on Art.* The original Chinese is: *shan chuan yu yu shen yu er ji hua ye.*

[98] *Ibid.* The original Chinese phrase is: shan chuan tuo tai yu yu.

thata (literally: "thus always"), the emptiness of the nature of things, Tathagata (literally: "(he who) comes thusly"), nirvana (literally: "not subject to birth and death"), the emptiness of all dharmas, the emptiness of all things causally produced, the Buddha and I are not two (i.e. all sentient beings have the Buddha nature), and the dharma realm of the one reality.[99] Laozi referred to it as "non being."[100] If an artist is capable of intuiting these terms then his artworks will be "spirited," and this is called "perfect understanding of one's nature."

47. The many flow along but the Dao ebbs. Artists must first flow and then ebb. Flowing transforms ebbing; ebbing transforms flowing.

Assimilate the subjective spirit and the spirt of the universe (the ontological spirit); from this you will obtain the truth[101] about the universe—human life—art. The composition of the artistic image implies the truth, goodness, and beauty of the spirit of the universe. That is, it implies that the artist's mind is self-purified and that the artist has completed an intrinsic combination of factors that allow him to evaluate the cultivation of his character. At the same time, the composition of the artistic image expresses the spiritual awakening of the artist to the life of the universe, and embodies the profound accordance between the inner life of the artist and the spirit of the universe.

48. As an artist, one must cultivate one's character, as only then can the artist achieve a profound unity with truth, the good, and the beautiful. The artworks will then inevitably reveal an artistic realm where the artist's own spirit and the spirit of the universe are in mutually harmony and mutual purity. This artistic realm is not merely the artist's creative state of mind; more importantly, the visual sensations of the artworks in this realm express the materialization of the Dao.

49. Mr. Li Keran (1907–1989), has said: "An artist must use the greatest determination to break into traditional art, and then use the greatest determination to break out." This is so, but I also feel, however, that an artist "must rationally break into traditional art, and then rationally break out." The reason that so many artists break into traditional art but so few break out is that they lack rationality, or that their rationality is irrational.

50. With respect to knowing the natural spirit of the universe, the dynamism that effectively launches an artist's subjective spirit also transforms the lines of these two spirits into one main line. The whole spirit of this singular transformation is expressed by means of the intuitive visual vocabulary of the artist's art. This is just the artistic realm of the artworks.

With respect to knowing the spirit of the universe, this spirit does not have an appearance but rather, by means of the existing exemplar of the appearances of things, allows the artist to understand inner truth, goodness, and beauty. This has been described as: "great wisdom is like stupidity,"[102] "great images have no forms," "great beauty is unadorned," and "great music uses sound sparingly."

The realm that integrates truth, goodness, and beauty must be expressed in the artwork's visual forms, and this is truly difficult. Our artistic predecessors embodied the eternal existence of this spirit of the universe through their own personal experiences, but this spirit was definitely not expressed in their artworks' visual forms. Today's artists, however, want to express this spirit but the traditional artistic vocabulary has limits, making necessary a creative leap with regards to the qualitative scope of artistic vocabulary.

This type of creativity is not just manna from Heaven, but rather it is an integration of our absorbing and mixing the artistic inheritance from the past, the present, and from China and abroad so that it expresses that 'Great Pristine' that arose from the chaos of the primeval state of the universe. "In primeval times, there was no artistic method because the Great Pristine had not broken loose from chaos. But as soon as the Great Pristine broke away from the primeval chaos, artistic method became established. How did artistic method become established? It became established as the uniqueness of painting." (Shitao)[103] This uniqueness of painting, from a conceptual standpoint, must be established by the artist himself.

51. Be an artist with theories, not a theoretical artist. Be a philosophic artist, rather than a poetic artist.

52. The Dao of Ink Landscapes are in essence experiencing for oneself the complete process of transforming the spirit of Chinese philosophy into the spirit of Chinese art.

53. The Dao of Ink Landscapes are patterns of activity for an awareness of the "Dao," and of course they must be subject to careful observation as "the spirit of the Dao." Awareness of the Dao then is just an awareness of the spirit of the Dao in the natural universe. Speaking from a certain perspective, the Dao of Ink paintings possess a "cosmological" significance because they play a further unique role as

[99] *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms.*

[100] *Wu*, "non being," is a concept developed by Laozi in the Daode Jing.

[101] The term translated as truth is *zhendi*, a Buddhist term that is the "truth" of a sage or person of insight in contrast to *sudi*, the common truth of those who know appearance but not reality.

[102] The saying: "Great wisdom is like stupidity" originated with the Song Dynasty poet Su Dongpo.

[103] This quote constitutes the opening lines of Shitao's *Quotations on Art*. My translation follows Wu Guanzhong's explication in his *Wo kan Shitao Hua Yulu*. The "Great Pristine" (*tai pu*) is another expression for the Dao. The Chinese for "the uniqueness of painting" is *yi hua* and, as Wu Guanzhong notes, this expression has a wide variety of interpretations. I follow Wu's explanation that the "uniqueness of painting" is simply the artist's own, unique experiences. Yi being understood to mean "unique" (*weiyi*).

an exploration of the natural universe, a role expressed via an artistic mode.

54. The natural images of the universe in the Dao of Ink Landscapes imply making visible my sentiments purified; that is to say, the organic content of the cultivation of my character. These are not only sentiments projected onto nature, but also sentiments that combine my inner life and the spirit of the universe. They embody my cosmological view of nature.

55. The nobility in purifying one's character is that it takes one to a realm where the self and the spirit of the universe are in mutual harmony and mutual purity. This kind of artistic realm is the aesthetic realm of the Dao of Ink Landscapes. It is also my aesthetic awareness of landscape painting.

If one wants to appreciate and intuit the existence of the spirit of the universe, this is not difficult to do. This spirit has no form and no image and cannot be seen; it is intangible and cannot be touched; it is not a thing that exists independently. Rather, this spirit exists by attaching itself to the images that you create, where it embraces the spirit of truth, goodness, and beauty. This spirit assimilates as one with your essential spirit becoming an intrinsic "consubstantial spirit."[104] Use this consubstantial spirt to cope with things and events, and use this consubstantial spirit to depict your landscapes.[105]

56. An artist's *raison d'être* is to exhibit his creativity, and whether or not the artist can discover and express new things. An artist should not hold onto artistic successes he himself has achieved but should continue to seek and explore because the art world is unlimited, so an artist should use his limited life to seek the unlimited artistic realm.

Translator: E. F. Connelly, PhD

[104] The term translated as "Consubstantial spirit" is *tongti jingshen*.

[105] The word "landscapes" here repeats the two words for mountains (*shan*) and waters (*shui*) that make up the Chinese word for landscapes (shan shui) so that the author is literally saying "to depict your mountains and waters."

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