



LANDSCAPE MORPHOLOGY

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF LANDSCAPE AESTHETICS

Jiahua Wu

A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

VOLUME I

DEPARTMENT OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE
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SUMMARY

This research is about landscape aesthetics.

Aesthetics is not purely Platonic but a result of human communication with nature which relates to landscape experience and, in turn, reflects and guides the way people appreciate, paint and design. This is an issue of art philosophy and design methodology.

To link theory with practice, the relationship between landscape — both painted and designed — and aesthetic thinking is the most important topic discussed throughout the writing. To achieve a relatively complete understanding of landscape aesthetics, the discussion develops with reference to the historical, cultural, philosophical and technical contexts of both the East and the West. Some key issues such as Romanticism of the English School and Tao in Chinese landscape have been chosen as the central objects of attention in the study. The manner of discussion, reason and analysis is one of comparison.

Taking into account the roles of philosophy in art and environmental design, 'Landscape Morphology', a systematic study of the language system of landscape art, design and education, is of high value in the area of environmental development, which substantially links the theory with environmental art and design, and foreshadows the future of landscape aesthetic research.

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PREFACE

In 1984 I founded a course in Environmental Art and set up a Department of Environmental Design at Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts, China. This was an attempt to bring architecture, landscape design and fine arts together in order to develop an interdisciplinary education to meet the growing need to improve the quality of the environment.

However, in examining the effectiveness of my teaching program and the design institute, I found there was a large gap between what I hoped to achieve and the reality, since there is still a lack of substantial communication between China and the outside world in the relevant academic areas. There is no systematic introduction to landscape design history or theory taught in other cultures and research into landscape aesthetics is underdeveloped, even though there appears to be a considerable influence from modern Western culture on Chinese “modernization”. With very limited resources and support, I became involved in the struggle to maintain the newly established course and institute.

Embarking on another ambitious task I came to England on a scholarship: I. to compare Western ideas about landscape with those of the East in order to achieve an understanding of different aesthetic approaches to landscape art, design and education. II. to try again to construct an outline of landscape philosophy for the immediate needs both of landscape practice and of education. I also hope that through this effort, I can introduce an analysis of Western ideas about landscape to the East, and at same time, convey to the West some of the most fundamental aesthetic ideas for instance, Tao in landscape.



To establish a suitable but comprehensive scope for this research is crucial in dealing with such a difficult task within a short time frame. Thus, the English School of landscape art and design which matured in the 18th century (a specific case which clearly reveals the variation of traditional Western landscape ideas and the evolutionary process of Western landscape aesthetics) and the Chinese School of traditional landscape art and design have been chosen as the central objects of attention in my research.

In short, the aims of this research are: to promote understanding between the West and the East; to link landscape aesthetics with environmental art and design; to develop an interdisciplinary education approach to philosophy, art and environmental studies.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Landscape aesthetics is a lonely subject that demands time, patience and energy on the part of the researcher and substantial support from time to time. My experience of undertaking research at Sheffield has led me to recognize this.

I am grateful to the sponsors of the Sino-British Friendship Scholarship and to the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals, UK, for awarding me the scholarships which have enabled me to undertake research in Britain for two and a half years. I also wish to thank the educational institutions of both Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts, China, and The University of Sheffield, UK, for allowing me, as a member of staff, to carry out this research.

In writing this dissertation, I have also incurred a great debt to many individuals, particularly to Professor Anne Beer, the Head of the Landscape Department of Sheffield University, for all her efforts from arranging the bursary to making available the facilities for the study; from discussing my research approach to giving me her intellectual inspiration. I am also grateful to Mr. Owen D. Manning for his supervision and encouragement in the research process.

Meanwhile, I have received great warmth from other members of the Department at Sheffield, while being an overseas visitor in England. The friendship of Mr. Nick Robinson, Dr. Oliver Gilbert, Dr. Ian Brotherton, Ms. Catherine Higgins have created a harmonious atmosphere for my research. Mrs. Judith Haigh and Ms. Judith Denton-Miles have been especially helpful in providing all sorts of assistance.

Several individuals also gave me valuable help. I am grateful to Ms. Jan Burgess and Ms. Penny Draper for their editorial advice; to Mr.



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INTRODUCTION

APPROACH

Without comparison, there is no complete understanding; without critical analysis, no real progress. This is the essential principle of the research.

To link theory with art and design, this study concentrates on ideas in landscape. The relationship between landscape, both painted and designed, and aesthetic thinking is the most important topic to discuss throughout the research.

In order to achieve a relatively complete understanding of landscape aesthetics, the study develops with reference to the historical, cultural and philosophical context of both the East and the West. The manner of discussion, reason and analysis is one of comparison.

To promote the understanding of the aesthetic ideas of landscape in both East and West, some basic introduction is necessary to the analysis of landscape thoughts, in order to demonstrate the consequences and implications of different philosophical and artistic trends.

FRAMEWORK

The research is divided into six parts which develop along the following lines: from a search for approaches to landscape aesthetics to the study of landscape art and design; from a general investigation to the comparison of different aesthetic thoughts; from theoretical study to



landscape morphology and relevant educational issues. It is a long journey from East to West, from theory to practice.

Landscape aesthetics is not something purely Platonic but relates to concrete landscape experience, which in turn reflects and guides the way people appreciate, paint and design.

Since the aim of landscape practice is to satisfy people both physically and psychologically, the research of landscape aesthetics may proceed along two different paths. The first is an experimental approach, through which the theorist pays more attention to a study of people's experience of landscape, and the aesthetic analysis, based on a search for understanding instinctive human responses to landscape. The second is a study which focuses on human cultural involvement in landscape, by which the aesthetic preference is sought through a discussion of a wide range of cultural issues such as philosophy, social evolution and changes in artistic ideas in certain historical contexts; the present research takes this road.

Whatever approach is chosen, the general aim of this research is to answer the basic aesthetic question: why and how do people like and design landscape. This question must involve the more basic aesthetic issues: the sense of beauty and human desires. Therefore, Part 1 of the research is a SEARCH which comprises 2 chapters: an exploration of the influential approaches to landscape aesthetics and a discussion of a general aesthetic model.

A further question is in what way or manner do people appreciate landscape. Here, the landscape observed and represented by artists is thought of as typical. Therefore, the influences of different artistic trends on ways of seeing and appreciating are re-examined in Part 2: IDEAS AND ART, in which the landscape painted by Western artists and Shan Shui painters in the East, and their philosophy of art are the central topic. Among these artistic issues, Romanticism and its relevant aesthetic categories such as 'Sense of Place': 'Locality' and 'Home of Feeling', etc.



find roots both in Western and Eastern culture. They are seen as the universal aesthetic ideas which involve people everywhere in creating what I call **Placescape**.

A more crucial question in the theory of landscape is the extent to which people have aesthetically designed landscape. The answers to this are sought through a systematic comparative study of the landscape ideas and design practice both of the English and of the Chinese School with historical, cultural, social, and geographical references. As the main body of this research, this section includes three parts: Part 3: TAO IN LANDSCAPE, Part 4: THE ENGLISH SCHOOL and Part 5: A COMPARATIVE STUDY AND CRITICISM.

These chapters cover a wide range of landscape issues and include an analysis of the consequences of philosophical and artistic trends both of the East and of the West. A particular research interest regarding the relationship between the empirical way of thinking and the Romantic orientation of landscape design and that between Tao and Chinese traditional landscape design is developed in order to uncover the philosophical sources of those landscape aesthetics and design methodology.

The link between Romanticism and landscape art and design is thus uncovered; the mood of the Romantics becomes tangible; designed landscape is seen as a sort of Placescape — a 'Home of Feeling'. It provides different people with great pleasure in different ways. It is also clear that romantic landscape ideas are rooted in the soil of empiricist thoughts and the philosophy of Tao. The heritage of the English and the Chinese School provides us with a direct source in the study of landscape aesthetics and an approach to landscape morphology.

Taking into account the roles of philosophy and art in landscape design, the methodology of landscape design itself and relevant educational issues, seen as major problems of modern landscape practice, are finally explored in part 6: AN OUTLINE OF LANDSCAPE



MORPHOLOGY. The meaning of ‘morphology’ here is of environment, culture and philosophy, which extends beyond the conventional meaning of artistic forms or designed spaces, implies the relationship between Form, Logic and Emotion, and directly involves artistic and design thinking in all contexts. The task of landscape morphology is to embody a general idea about landscape aesthetics in a Placescape combined considered with social and cultural roles, human needs and environmental balance. This foreshadows the future of the research in landscape aesthetics and substantially links aesthetic theory with the interdisciplinary education in environmental art and design.

ABOUT ILLUSTRATIONS

A visualized analysis of the differences and changes of artistic ideas and environmental thoughts can help readers to experience the whole evolutionary process of landscape aesthetics and to think with images for bridging abstract concepts with forms of art and design. Personally I prefer making drawings to using a camera or copy machine, since through the drawing and graphic medium I can read (feel) those marvelous works, appreciate our cultural heritage and the creative process of the masters more and deeper. Although it is very time consuming, it has deepened my understanding and given me a confidence in analyzing and criticizing the ideas of art and design.

All free hand drawings and photographs are made by author except those photographs in Part 2 which are reproduced with the kind permission of the National Gallery and Tate Gallery in London and the Cultural Department of the Chinese Embassy in Britain. Among them, some are my own original works of both painting and design or the records of my own graphic notes for teaching which follow the sequence of the discussion.



**ABOUT CHINESE PINYIN SYSTEM:
A SYSTEM OF CHINESE PHONETIC ALPHABET**

The standardized modern Chinese Phonetic Alphabet is used throughout for future convenience of academic communication between the East and the West except some specific terms such as Chi, Tao, Taoism, Confucius, Confucianism, Zen, etc., which are widely adopted in the literature both by Chinese and Western scholars. However, when these specific terms appear in the text for the first time they are followed by notes identifying them with the Chinese Pinyin System, a standardized modern Chinese Phonetic Alphabet.



PART 1

A SEARCH





1

APPROACHES TO LANDSCAPE AESTHETICS

People experience landscape in many ways. The diversity of the experience suggests an approach to landscape aesthetics. However, whichever approach is chosen, the aim of the aesthetic study is to uncover the essence of landscape beauty and the way people participate in it; and a comparison of different landscape ideas and practices will help us to overcome our own limitations to achieve this aim.

1.1

LANDSCAPE DESIGN

This research attempts to find an approach to landscape aesthetics which functions as a link between the theory and the practice of landscape design. Landscape design is seen as one of the most positive way people involve themselves in landscape and as an intensive reflection of landscape aesthetic thoughts. Thus, to define the categories of this research, we first have to discuss the main tasks of a landscape designer.

The term 'landscape' is used in many ways by different specialists. For instance there even is a so-called "political landscape". According to T. Turner (1990) the word 'landscape' arrived in England with the Angles, Saxons and Jutes. Originally, "Landscape was a system of areas of cultured land" and the word ceased to be used in Old English. The word



was re-introduced into English from the Dutch during the 17th century as a painter's term, meaning "a picture representing natural inland scenery, as distinguished from a sea picture, a portrait, etc. During the 18th century the word 'landscape' accompanied 'gardening', since 'landscape' has a close relation to the design profession. In the 19th century geologists and geographers started using the word 'landscape' to mean 'a tract of land'. The complexity of the word is now becoming greater in the West with the increasing impact of environmental issues. The design profession, 'Landscape Architecture' was initiated in the West. Following the idea, Japan, South Korea and some parts of China in the East in turn established similar institutions. Thus, Landscape Architecture has become a world-wide term to define a certain kind of environmental design profession.

Although it is 150 years since the term Landscape Architecture emerged and became a design specialty, [1] the definition of the term is still of doubtful authenticity. Understanding landscape varies along with the change of attitude towards environmental issues. As an academic and practical subject, study of the discipline has become broader in scope and the practice of landscape design involves a wide range of environmental issues. It is difficult to define exactly what the term Landscape Architecture means in today's society.

According to *The Oxford Companion to Gardens* (1986): "Landscape architecture is the art and the science of the design and integration of the natural and man-made elements of the earth, with the

¹ According to *The Oxford Companion to Garden* (1986, p.322): The term appears to be have been used first by Gilbert Meason, a friend and co-traveler of Sir Walter Scott, in his book *On The Landscape Architecture of The Great Paintings of Italy* (1828), and subsequently taken up by Omlmster and Vaux for their plan of Central Park, New York. in 1858. The American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) was established in 1899. A year later the first university course in landscape architecture was started at Harvard. The first British designer to adopt the title of landscape architect was Patrick Geddes (1854-1932), who was trained as a biologist. He developed as an important theorist in town and country planning.



materials of which — earth, water, vegetation, and built elements — the landscape architect is responsible for making places, for a variety of uses and habitation.” Here, the meaning is still ambiguous. Firstly, if we are not sure why landscape is still a sort of “architecture”, is it really necessary to define the design activities of landscape as those of architecture in nature? Secondly, since landscape architecture now covers such a wide range of environmental issues, then what is the difference between landscape architecture and environmental planning (town planning, country planning, site planning, etc.)? In the modern sense we may also think that any kind of design is some sort of art and science, in particular, environmental design or housing planning which are indeed the art and the science of the design and integration of the natural and man-made elements of the earth. Nowadays, even architects must also demonstrate their concern with the same environmental issues. Thus, the scope of the professional field has widened and makes no distinction between landscape architecture and general environmental design; it can cause confusion in design practice and design education as well as research. Therefore, a suitably defined field for this profession is necessary.

Actually, many landscape designers, planners, scientists, theorists and educators have also noticed these problems. One scholar even thought that “landscape architecture was an eccentric idea.” [2] Meanwhile, the publications of The British Landscape Institute (founded in 1929 as the Institution of Landscape Architects) indicate that the main tasks of the professional body are to serve the three divisions of professional landscape work: landscape design, science and management, [3] in which the term landscape architecture seems to be avoided.

2 Tom Turner (1990): *Was 'Landscape Architecture' A Good Idea?* *LANDSCAPE DESIGN*, June 1990, UK.

3 See the Publication of The Landscape Institute, 1990, p.2.



Also, it seems that the term “landscape architecture” is not satisfactory for the landscape planner and designer. For instance, A. Beer (1990) made it clear that:

“In English there are two main definitions of landscape planning. They derived from the different usage of the word landscape: Interpretation 1: where the word landscape = scenery (it is what we see), then the term landscape planning = planning a beautiful environment. Interpretation 2: where the word landscape = nature plus mankind (it is what we live in), then the term of landscape planning = planning a habitat suitable for mankind within the parameters set by the physical and natural environment ... It is the second definition which allows us to develop the link between landscape planning and environmental protection.” [4]

According to A. Beer, landscape planning is seen “as a way of thought, a philosophical approach which allows planners, politicians, and the public to realise that all decisions on land-use planning and land management must be based on the fullest possible understanding of the interaction between man and nature.” [5] Obviously, A. Beer tries to extend the perception of the landscape planner to a wider understanding of environmental issues and particularly the quality of the living environment. Her view is that landscape planning should be a part of the total environmental design, rather than a kind of landscape management or design activity for providing scenery. Following this understanding, aspects of landscape planning may pervade the urban, rural or countryside planning which go far beyond the conventional ‘architectural sense’.

On landscape, Owen D. Manning (1975) suggested: “only two-part or even three-part definitions can convey adequately what is meant by landscape.” The first part of his definition of landscape is “natural

4 A. Beer (1990): *The Contribution of Landscape Planning to Environmental Protection.*

5 A. Beer (1990): *The Contribution of Landscape Planning to Environmental Protection.*



landscape”, “the total array of features resulting from natural processes acting upon the surface of the earth.” The second part, “humanised landscape”, is the result of a natural process interrupted, modified or replaced by human activities; it can be called the “landscape of land-use” and also can be described as “the everyday landscape” forming the background of daily life. Further, he subdivided the second part of his definition of landscape into the “conscious and unconscious” or “designed and without designed” landscape. On designed landscape he describes it as: “the result of a conscious attempt to satisfy accepted standards of aesthetic quality in our surroundings.” His definition of landscape design is a process of organising and modifying selected features, both natural and artificial, in order to solve conflicts of land-use, while satisfying the above aesthetic standards and generally promoting human enjoyment of the landscape. [6]

Although the above interpretations are different, the one thing that landscape design and planning have in common is, in part, their relationship to total environmental design. The design field is defined by the attributes of landscape change itself. In other words, it is the design elements which link science and technique with the control of environmental changes through concern for the relationship between nature and human life. Thus, the most appropriate title for this profession is simply LANDSCAPE DESIGN.

Landscape is a result of the evolution of natural and human processes. As a part of the objective world, it can be studied philosophically; as a ‘thing’, it can be examined scientifically; as a kind of art phenomenon, it can be appreciated and interpreted or designed artistically; as a designed place, it can be preserved, rearranged, or improved technically. The diverse approaches to landscape demonstrates

⁶ Owen. D. Manning (1975): ‘*The Nature of Landscape and Landscape Design*’, *Landscape Design*, Journal of Landscape Institution, 1975, UK.



that the study of landscape aesthetics is a complicated and multi-faceted subject.

Generally, there are two different approaches to the study of landscape aesthetics. The first is through a study of human “objective” responses to landscape in order to understand the relationship between human and landscape; this approach is psychologically (or environmental psychology) oriented. The other approach is by re-examining the change of human landscape ideas to find out why and how people appreciate and cope with landscape; this is usually a philosophy, history and culture based study. Here, we call the first an “Experimental Approach”; the way of this approach is from the “bottom” to the “top”, i. e. from the study of landscape experience to the aesthetic theory. The second we call a “Philosophical Approach” which goes from the “top” to the “bottom”, i.e. from landscape ideas to the practice. In terms of landscape design, the aim of both should be to answer the same basic question:

In what ways do people appreciate and design landscape?

However, whichever approach we choose, it is difficult to reach satisfactory conclusions, because aesthetic thoughts relate to such a wide range of cultural, social, philosophical and scientific issues. Yet, the answers should not be too complicated since landscape is a part of our everyday living environment; we are designing and living in it, we are part of landscape.



1.2

EXPERIMENTAL APPROACH

The experimental approach to landscape aesthetics is a continuing process of discovery, in which the human instinctive response to landscape is seen as a basic research object. Usually, the framework of this kind of research is to investigate human biological responses to the immediate environment through understanding the primal reactions which determine a certain kind of environmental pattern, then to sort out the relationships between the behavioral patterns and the environmental patterns, and finally to put forward a hypothesis of landscape aesthetic theory.

When emphasis is placed on the observation of human behavior, the research is based on the study of biological facts; when the starting point of the research is human psychological reactions, the research will concentrate on the study of how people as individuals or as a group respond to their immediate environs, bearing in mind a wide range of social and relevant scientific aspects. Numerous studies have been done in recent years, research approaches such as Habitat Theory, Prospect and Refuge Theory and Psychological Reflection Theory are typical.

According to Jay Appleton, the Habitat Theory “is about the ability of a place to satisfy all our biological needs” and “aims to study the human behavior of habitat selection which asserts that the relationship between the human observer and perceived environment is basically the same as the relationship of a creature to its habitat.” [7]

As a foundation of the research, habitat selection is seen as a basic type of behavior studied for linking human behavior with landscape experience. For instance, in the study by Gordon H. Orians (1986), the

⁷ Jay Appleton (1975), *Experience of Landscape*, John Wiley & Sons, Chichester, New York. p.70.



process of selecting a site may follow the following HIERARCHICAL MODEL:

1. Choice of habitat
2. Choice of patch
3. Choice of behavior mode
4. Response to specific objects

Also, “consequentially, habitat selection mechanisms have been under the strong influence of natural selection in most species.” [8] In the course of habitat selection the key stage is to get information to make the decision about where the ideal place is to live. Therefore, exploration as an intrinsically biological activity relates to the relationships between the creatures and their immediate environments. Thus, the concepts of familiarity and Unfamiliarity; complexity and simplicity; safety and hazard which relate to the quality of environments, may come to be important subjects in the study of environmental experiences. By so doing, scientists attempt to uncover the mystery of how people experience environment and why they like certain kinds of environment. Logically, if a environment is understood as preferable, then the pattern of the environment may be the prototype of landscape that people like. With aesthetics, human preference can be understood as a kind of primitive (subconscious) aesthetic response to landscape which may be understood as a source of the aesthetic research. For instance, according to Gordon H. Orians (1986), the SAVANNA as a type of primitive environment with scattered trees and canopies in a matrix of grassland is seen as a highly preferred environment for people and should evoke a strong positive reaction which also suggests the aesthetic pattern of man-made landscape.

By exploring how human curiosity responds to and how human emotion can be evoked by the experience of a productive SAVANNA type

8 Gordon H. Orians (1986): *An Ecological and Evolutionary Approach to Landscape Aesthetics*, Edmund C. Penning-Roswell and David Lowenthal (Ed. 1986): *Landscape Meaning and Values*, Allen and Unwin Ltd. London. p.5.



of land, the habitat selection theory aims at capturing some of the roots of beauty, such as “functional evaluation of the value of objects for carrying certain tasks and being able to clarify objects and to place specific things in their ‘proper’ places.” [9] The study of habitat selection is relevant to the issues of landscape aesthetics and provides a valuable reference for the aesthetic study.

A more systematic study of the aesthetics has been done by Jay Appleton. His work, known as Prospect and Refuge Theory, is also based on the understanding of human behavior and has further explored landscape experience. Prospect and Refuge Theory has had certain influences on the study of landscape aesthetics. As a hypothesis it provides a possible answer to basic aesthetic questions and makes a linkage between primitive human experience and landscape aesthetics.

On the concept of prospect and refuge, Jay Appleton wrote:

"Having established, then, that there is much evidence to show that at both human and sub-human level the ability to see and the ability to hide are both important in calculating a creature's survival prospects, we must next see whether we can find some means of erecting a system for classifying the components of landscape according to this simple principle, whether or not they are conducive to the observer seeing and hiding. Where he has an unimpeded opportunity to see we can call it a prospect. Where he has an opportunity to hide, a refuge." [10]

“To see without being seen” (Lorenz) may be the core or starting point and behavioral basis of Appleton's thinking. It is different from seeking shelter since the prospect and refuge theory places more emphasis on the animate pursuer. The seeing and hiding, as the complementary factors, function simultaneously in the hunting process. Appleton

⁹ Gordon H. Orians (1986): *An Ecological and Evolutionary Approach to Landscape Aesthetics*, p.5.

¹⁰ Jay Appleton (1975), *Experience of Landscape*, John Wiley & Sons, Chichester, New York, p.73.



confirms that: “Similarly, a landscape which affords both a good opportunity to see and a good opportunity to hide is aesthetically more satisfying than one which affords neither, but again weakness in prospect or in refuge may be compensated for strength in the other.” [11]

Appleton sorts out his principles of evaluating landscape aesthetics by establishing the symbolic meaning of Prospect-Refuge. The possibilities of arranging the relationships between the two elements are seen as the basis for analyzing the experience of landscape, which directly relates to the study of landscape aesthetics.

According to Appleton, “The potential variety of aesthetic experience which can be derived from the complication of landscape can be achieved in many ways, but principally by varying (I) the objects employed to symbolize prospects and refuges, (II) the manner and intensity with which they symbolize them, (III) the spatial arrangement of the symbols, (IV) the equilibrium of prospect and refuge symbols, and (V) the physical media by which an arrangement is communicated to the perceiver.”[12]. These ideas structured the main body of Appleton’s landscape aesthetic theory which, as an outline, has developed to become an entire framework of experience of landscape and a symbolic system.

The concepts of prospect and refuge convey the symbolic meaning. The relationships between the two symbols are abstract but, according to Appleton’s theoretical framework, they can be used to explain what is happening in the landscape and can also be used to analyze how different landscape components work together in a landscape. This is the real value of the Prospect and Refuge Theory and possibly acting as a channel to transfer aesthetic ideas into landscape appreciation and design practice.

11 Jay Appleton (1975), *Experience of Landscape*, John Wiley & Sons, Chichester, New York, p.73-74.

12 Jay Appleton (1975), *Experience of Landscape*, p.74.



Interestingly, the Prospect and Refuge Theory is somehow a reminder of the theory of Yin and Yang [13] of ancient Chinese philosophy, an idea which is very much methodologically oriented and has had substantial influence on Chinese design philosophy. As a link between theory and design, the Yin Yang theory is the foundation of Chinese philosophical thinking, for instance the philosophy of Tao (this will be discussed in Part 3), whereas the Prospect and Refuge Theory stems from the examination of behavior — “to see without being seen”. That is why we see the approach of Prospect and Refuge theory as empirically oriented.

In short, through the experimental approach, the theorists attempt to touch the essence of landscape aesthetics by testing interactions between human and their immediate environment. However, human involvement in landscape can be of philosophy and culture in nature, which is another important aspect studied through the philosophical approach to landscape aesthetics.

1.3

AESTHETICS & CULTURAL INVOLVEMENT

Although landscape aesthetics is a relatively recent theoretical discipline, the history of the practice both of landscape art and design is as long as that of human civilization. While experience of landscape relates to people’s instinctive response to their immediate environment, it is also influenced tremendously by certain cultural, social and philosophical factors. Thus, landscape is not only a natural or biological phenomenon, but also one of culture. Aesthetics as refined landscape ideas should not

13 Yin Yang: Male and Female, this theory I will discuss in following Chapters in detail.



be understood as a study with only one discipline, since it also involves a great deal of thought which relates to a general world outlook. This world outlook, to some extent, influences our way of seeing, feeling and touching landscape. In other words, behind the human landscape experience, there is a framework of people's thoughts functioning at times prior to the experience and having a decisive influence on people's attitude to landscape.

A place may be experienced by many people or different groups of them, but the results of their experiences are usually quite different. One place may leave varied impressions upon different people or evoke different emotions of them. For instance, a ruin for some people is a symbol of the grandeur of the past; for others, it may be a lonely and sad place; a garden, for the rich, is a place which has certain aesthetic values; for the poor, it is a place mainly for supplying vegetables or herbs. Therefore, there is no universal, standard impression or understanding of a place at all.

The manner of experiencing landscape is as diverse as landscape itself. Traditionally, we analyze this phenomenon in terms of taste, fashion or style. However, in relation to aesthetics, these changeable factors raise great difficulties for us, since there is almost nothing we can make judgment on in the way of saying 'Yes or No'. The issues of landscape experience involve all sorts of social, philosophical and artistic aspects in which we must be concerned in regard to different cultural contexts. For instance, the influence of certain social evolutionary processes and social systems can influence the way people think, their beliefs, life style or customs and even their mood, which can also influence the artistic flavour and approaches to art or design decisively.

Among the above subjects, landscape art and landscape design practice are everywhere in the world and are the most direct expressions of people's landscape ideas. Thus, landscape practice should be seen as a direct source for the study of landscape aesthetics. The aim of painting a



landscape is to express a refined landscape aesthetic experience; the motivation for designing landscape is to represent and embody their ideal of life in reality. These activities reflect the key ideas of their landscape aesthetic thoughts both immediately and intensively. Therefore, it is valuable to study human landscape preference by re-examining the landscape painted and designed, i.e. to study exactly what people have expressed through their artistic media in certain cultural circumstances, particularly the places that have been designed as desirable landscape. I call this a 'Direct Approach' to landscape aesthetics and the key issue of this kind of study is the influence of philosophy which guides the understanding and use the language of landscape art and design.

To draw an aesthetic conclusion through this direct approach we also involve the study of history and culture, since the facts that will be examined are those of heritage, and the art and design left by our ancestors. Indeed, if some landscape ideas have existed and influenced us for centuries, there must be some reason; some designed places are still so attractive that there must be extraordinary design ideas and techniques within them, and these are the substantial components of the aesthetics which relate closely to landscape practice.

Moreover, there are so many designed landscapes, so many marvelous ideas and approaches to landscape art in the world, particularly in the East and the West, that the treasure of landscape design must be enormous. For instance, in China, there is no term for 'landscape aesthetics' in the Western sense of traditional design theory. However, the landscape practice and achievements both of the art and the design have their own unbroken tradition and certain influences throughout the world. Thus, in searching for a complete understanding of landscape aesthetics, a comparison study of landscape phenomena both in the East and the West has a specific value for us in understanding the differences and parallels of those cultures to further uncover the ideas behind these landscape



traditions in order to contribute to the understanding of the essential aspects of human landscape aesthetic ideas.

To seek the answers, we need to go back to the past. There we may find some new discoveries which may help us to establish a historical continuation and revise our “modernized” landscape ideas. What is more, the world is not as big as we think; environmental influences cannot be bound by any social system, national or any kind of human boundaries. The wise choice for us is to share concerns with, to learn from, to advise one another; to try, at least, to understand one another. Therefore, a comparative study is obviously necessary in order to overcome the limitations of our own culture and knowledge, to maintain and develop our individualities within a wider scope in a healthy manner at a higher level.

Landscape design, as a universal cultural phenomenon, relates to human basic desires. Thus, the starting point of this long journey is a discussion of a general aesthetic model. Through this, I try to find a common base for further discussion and establishing an agreeable aesthetic understanding in the process of comparison.



2

A GENERAL AESTHETIC MODEL

We can prove things by scientific experiments , but cannot prove a sense of beauty, since human feeling, emotion, and preference cannot be simply measured by quantity or analyzed according to standardized quality.

The exploration of landscape aesthetics seems even more troublesome; it is a concept both culturally and scientifically based which involves a great deal of “soft” knowledge such as feelings, intuition, thoughts, and relevant cultural and social issues. Thus, when discussing why people appreciate or design landscape, the question must relate to basic human desires.

As a starting point of this study, the first topic is about the sense of beauty.



2.1 SENSE OF BEAUTY

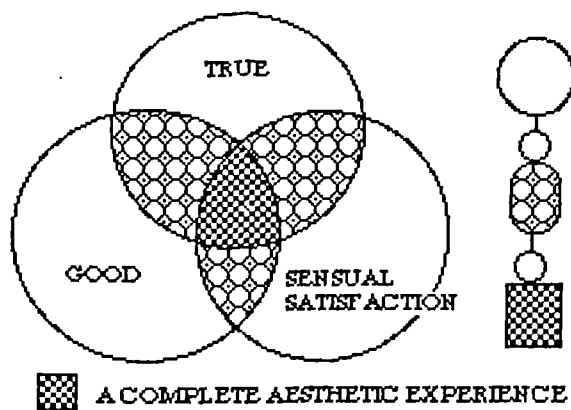
What is beauty? The problem is as old as history. Although a sense of Beauty relates to feelings of pleasure, we can feel pleasure of various sorts, in many ways; we can hardly impose a definition of beauty. Actually we must be very cautious to make any aesthetic judgment, since we are aware of the limitations of our own experience which is usually temporary, one-sided, or culturally conditioned. For this reason, beauty may not simply be equal to things that once gave us a certain sensual comfort or some sort of pleasure. The understanding of beauty is a synthetic process in which the actions of perceiving, learning and thinking must work together over a period of time towards a certain kind of aesthetic judgment. Beauty is something we cannot easily define.

In fact, beauty belongs to a metaphysical realm, since any aesthetic judgment is finally subjectively oriented. As a two-way process from perceiving to understanding and from analyzing to further experiencing, the search for a sense of beauty is a demanding process of experiencing and reasoning.

Let us take a commonplace object as an example. When using a cup, we must first ensure that it is actually a cup. If it is a pot, a pan, or a bowl, or something else, we will refuse to use it. Thus, the first task is to identify the object, i.e. to question the attributes, to answer 'Yes or No', 'True or False'? Secondly, we shall try to use it as a container for drinking. Here, functions of the cup should be examined, i.e. to question: does it work well for drinking and handling? Further, there are more detailed questions: what kind of material is it made of? what is the quality, i.e. is it safe and durable? In addition, one more question may be: how much does it cost? Is the price reasonable? Those are tastes for good or functional satisfaction. Thirdly, we shall think about what it looks like.



How pleasing is the shape, the colour, and the texture? Is there any style? Does it satisfy the user's taste? These are the questions about visual qualities or meanings of forms. Finally, after the three stages, one can make an aesthetic judgment: whether the cup is good or not. Therefore, a complete aesthetic experience may be the following:



The sequence followed in the experiencing process may be variable, but it should cover the above basic stages. An object which is neither functional, nor attractive but only something in name, we dislike; if it is both good for looking at and right in attribute (surely being identified) but does not work well, it is devalued; if it is only attractive in appearance, but neither functional, nor well identified, it is rejected.

Actually, we usually call things beautiful too easily, or just think visually. Once we take something seriously, particularly when we make a judgment about a project, for example, a housing plan or a landscape design which relates to our life, work, children, even dignity, where we may incur huge sums in the investment of labour and money, our aesthetic comments must be very carefully built up and considered, rather than simply a visual spontaneous response. Therefore, there is a hierarchy in



understanding of the sense of beauty. In this sense, the concept of a designer must be different from that of a layman, since the role of the design is not to provide things only for looking at; the sense of beauty for a designer also means responsibility.

Thus, unlike conventional aesthetic theory, in design thinking the aesthetic process is analytical in nature. So-called 'sense impressions' are integrated in a process which incorporates a broader and deeper analysis of human desires.

The procedure of experiencing sense impressions varies. Some observers may be very sensitive to the visual quality of objects; for instance, when artists see things, impressions of colours and forms influence their initial aesthetic experience. Some value utility or function; for instance, manufacturers or equipment users; an analysis of the functions for this kind of thinking usually comes first. There is also the sort of mind which seriously thinks first about the basic attributes of things; for instance, a scientist or philosopher. There is no formulated way for aesthetic thinking; even so, the general categories of aesthetic aspects are worth studying.

Influenced by ways of thinking, aesthetics orients both rationally and experimentally, increasing the complexity of the research of aesthetics. However, it should not be too mystical to be understood, since there is no real life without a sense of beauty; and because we also enjoy aesthetic experience in daily life, it is part of our ordinary being and can be seen as contributing to our knowledge of living. Thus, aesthetics is also a sort of mass philosophy.

Beauty is not an isolated concept; it cannot exist by its own reason without other kinds of knowledge. History, for example, can be seen as a sort of collective experience which usually influences our sense of beauty tremendously. Reviewing history, even our personal life, it is not difficult to realise that life is a process of seeking a relatively good state, a kind of balance between contradictory factors: establishing and destroying, rising



and declining, forward and backward, suffering and enjoying, happy and unhappy, rich and poor, interesting and dull, etc. Sense of beauty derives from a harmonious balancing between different factors in a different place and time. The balance, to some extent, is a compromise between desire and reality which helps us avoid extreme trends or a one-sided pursuit, and while nothing is perfect, absolute fulfillment is impossible. Therefore, beauty is also a relative concept which is conditioned by time and space and our limited experience, knowledge and cultural origins — cultivated and influenced by our increased learning and ability. Although the sense of beauty changes with time, place and culture as a part of basic human desire, it exists forever and is the generator of the development of human civilization.

Some say beauty “seems to convey a sense of something extreme” [1] which reminds us of the concept of **Perfection**. It is a typical symbol of endless human desire which means that an object, a situation or a relationship is absolutely good, and can provide us with a flawless combination of all kinds of satisfaction. The idea of perfection can also be seen as an aesthetic ideal in religious form in which imagination has replaced reality. This suggests that an absolutely flawless realm does not and cannot exist; it can only be described, sought and continuously pursued. So, the idea of perfection is the ultimate goal in the form of dreams, beliefs, *isms* or religion. It may be possible to lean towards or come close to but hardly be reached. However, we cannot undervalue this absolute ideological concept, for it was the ideal which resulted in the theory of the so-called ‘Ideal Form’ and rational order and has persisted all through the history of art and design. [2]

1 David Pye: *The Nature and Aesthetics of Design*, p.96.

2 See Parts 2, 4, and 5.



2.2

HUMAN DESIRE AND GENERAL AESTHETIC ISSUES OF ENVIRONMENT

What is human desire? This is a big question, but the answer may be extremely simple: for the Good, the True, the Beautiful.

For the Good, what comes first is surviving, then improving. For instance, a wild natural landscape is usually a source of adventure and a sanctuary for escaping from the illness of modern urban life. Yet, for primitives, it was the field of struggling for survival. We cannot imagine exactly how hard primitive life might have been or their feelings about their natural world, but we can deduce some reasonable conclusions from the legacy left by them. In early the wall paintings the “artists” of Lascaux in southern France and Altamira in northern Spain, there is no landscape at all, just the amazing realistic animal figures. There are many explanations made by art historians; however, the most convincing suggest a basic food supply for the earliest hunter. The imaginative forms of the animals might also be a symbolic expression of an early understanding of the natural force. Of course, while the Paleolithic artists were familiar with the animals they were hunting, they also wanted to express their desire to have the same powers as those of the animals. Yet it also might be an expression of the threat arising from the hazardous position humanity occupied in nature at that early stage. The landscape record left by the agricultural people of ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt and China suggests that in these early civilizations, human life was relatively stable than before. Yet wildness was still the symbol of the hardship of human life. That is why compared with other art forms, the painting of landscape came so much later. The first landscape painting is found in Hellenistic wall paintings of the first quarter of the first century AD and the earliest



complete Chinese landscape painting was made about the end of the 4th century AD. [3] It took a long time to be able to appreciate landscape.

To those whose livelihood is difficult, landscape and particularly designed landscape is a luxury. For instance, in most front and back yards of a Chinese farmhouse, vegetables, even corn is grown, although the country is world famous for its traditional gardening. The same is true in England: the upper-middle class may talk more about the beauty of a garden; but the average person may think more about how to make living. The landscape for a whole community is usually the topic of the idealists or specialists.

On landscape itself, there are many issues simply concerning Goodness. It is part of the process of our ecological control of the changing environment that directly relates to human well being and matters of quality of all basic physical requirements such as “fertile soil, clean water, clean air and shelter”. [4] In terms of sociology, it is in social life as the extension of personal living or as the public space of a whole community. Landscape, particularly designed landscape in the urban environment or countryside surrounding the cities, is a very influential part of the environment which affects quality of life and even influences the economical prospect of a region. That is why the potential of the Peak District National Park in South Yorkshire (UK) region is highly valued and Hangzhou city in China is seen as a national treasure.

If searching for the good is a progression from surviving to improving, then searching for the true is a process of finding references for living by the meaning of life in a knowing and communicating way.

A substantial knowledge of the environment is, of course, a priority for survival. Biologically, life needs space, air, water and a food supply,

3 See Chapter 3 in detail.

4 Anne R. Beer (1990): *Environmental Planning for Site Development*, E & F. N. Spon, London, New York. p.20.



however, as civilized humans, what we also need is a context in which all the basic requirements are given a certain individuality. Problems such as where do I come from? where do I belong? become central and will be expressed consciously or unconsciously in respect to the changes in our living. The words: foreigner, guest, tramp, stranger, intruder, etc. strongly suggest environmental attributes of uncertainty or unfamiliarity causing people to feel unsafe, nervous or fearful. Conversely, a sense of liberation and confidence arises from sure knowledge of a place: a knowledge of what is meant by the true in relation to environment.

Beyond these basic needs, environmental elements such as a particular landform, water, trees or other kind of landmark such as a monument, temple, garden, etc. are added in order to confirm their identity. Landscape becomes one of the most important references (or background) to help to identify a homeland; for instance, the Lake district in northern England, West Lake for Hangzhounesse. Designed landscape serves as the symbolic expression of their understanding of a place, for example the Mosques erected on the dry land of the Middle East, the classical mansion on the green of England, the mystical gardens behind walls in the crowded housing areas of southern China.

As a key part of their structure of knowledge, an understanding of nature and their beliefs are also connected with the facts about a place which relate not only to abstract meanings but also to the way a place has been structured. Thus, in many ancient cultures, land and landscape is given soul or spirit, and different parts of the landscape may be governed by different gods: god of mountain, god of sea, god of river, god of field. Even in our modern sense, the meaning of landscape is still a very important aspect of a design approach which concerns itself with a healing environment both socially and psychologically. Therefore, something for the true is a process of finding references for knowledge and communication with environment, identifying people with place.



Once people have their own place, they always try to find which part of the place is worth appreciating. They will talk about it, paint it, maintain or improve it. However, sensuous satisfactions eventually must be conveyed by idea and emotion, since human feeling arises not only from pure biological response to physical satisfactions, but out of experiences inevitably influenced by memory and reason relating to certain past experiences, education, cultural convention, and personal life as well. Therefore, for the beautiful that refers not only to the physically agreeable experience, touch, taste, smell and so on, but also to the highest feeling of love: **Love with Thinking.**

For instance, we agree that a picture of sublime scenery may evoke certain lofty feelings to the looker, but in the minds of the British, the images which are thought as typically sublime may be North Wales, Scotland or North Yorkshire or an image of a seapainting; whereas that of the Chinese may be the Taihang or Quanlan Mountains. The same aesthetic feeling may be conveyed by different images, or pictures, expressed in different media and techniques. That is why Constable means so much to the British; Shitao to the Chinese. [5] Here the sense of homeland, the concept of locality, the quality of originality and individuality are the essentials for the beautiful. Beyond what we call biological requirements, people have a "Romantic" urge; the desire to derive emotions from a place is a human instinct. Thus, for the beautiful, that is mostly a progression from sensation to emotion; we cannot reason this process by a scientific or logical approach, we can only accept it and understand it by eliminating our own cultural preoccupation. [6] In particular, this is necessary when we cope with a general study of human environmental experience.

5 Also see parts 2 and 3.

6 In parts 2, 3, 4, and 5 we shall fully discuss this issue.



In general, the main issue of environmental aesthetics is to discuss the qualities for living, i.e. to study how people select, establish and improve their living environment and the way they like, appreciate and design their places. Landscape is defined as a typical kind of beautiful environment where human desires and their sense of beauty are intensely reflected.

Human aesthetic attitudes towards environment relate to the perception of different environmental elements. When an environment is valued, the basic aspects of human desire which we have discussed before are still the influential factors. What is looked for are either information or benefits, or emotional sympathy:

- I. knowledge to identify the attribute of a specific place (for the True);
- II. utility to gain profit (for the Good);
- III. expression to release their feeling of love (for the Beautiful).

The initial motives may induce various aesthetic activities. Usually, an environment can be evaluated by its physical qualities: the spatial characteristics, the function it supports, and other relevant material attributes. This may come before other issues to be studied at the first stage in the process of valuing a place. However, the cumulative aesthetic impact of a place on the beholder will evoke certain kinds of emotions through which people derive their own specific feeling about the place; thus an aesthetic process is made complete. As we discussed before, the motivations experienced in an environment are not necessarily clearly separated into the above categories. With time, experiences of a place will be enriched, over-lapped, combined and transferred. Thus, for achieving a relatively complete aesthetic understanding of an environment, an overall survey is usually needed.



A person's attitude towards the natural world reflects their ability to cope with environments and their mode of life. The attitudes are not static, but change along with the natural and human processes. The essential relationship between nature and human could be put in these terms: "Just as the child needs the care and protection, the love and companionship of the family if he is to develop fully and freely, so does humanity need contact with nature and with soil, and the comfort and refreshment of natural beauty in the surrounding." [7][Fig. 2-1]

From prehistoric ages to the present time, sensitive artists always have led a way of seeing by their paintings, and the indigenous designers have satisfied human desire through their ideas and projects. Landscape painting and landscape design are the twin sisters which have embodied human landscape aesthetic ideas for centuries. Thus, an understanding of landscape aesthetics will benefit greatly from a discussion which leads from the matter of art to that of design.

⁷ Brenda Colvin (1970): *Land and Landscape*, John Murray, London, p.4.

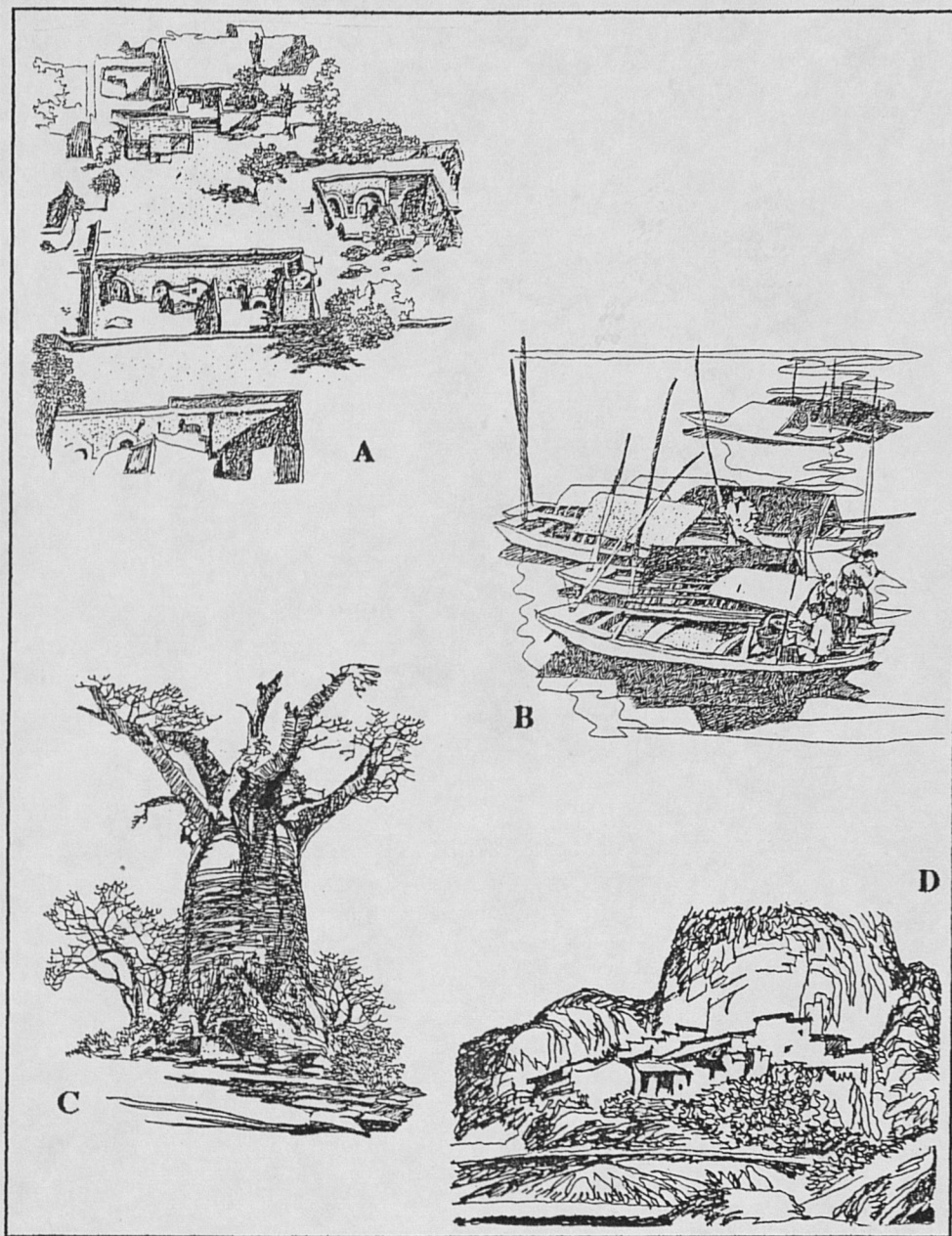


Fig. 2-1: MAN AND SOIL, MAN AND TREES, MAN AND WATER, MAN AND MOUNTAIN. Our living relies on the natural environment which we are a part of. Humanity needs contact with nature and with soil, the comfort and refreshment surrounding natural beauty.



PART 2

IDEAS AND ART





3

LANDSCAPE FRAMED

An immediate question facing us in the study of landscape aesthetics is how to appreciate and represent landscape?

Landscape painting is one of the most direct media used to involve ourselves in places, express our emotions and depict certain ideas. It is silent, but communicative. We may call it a two-dimensional landscape language. In order to achieve a relatively complete understanding of how landscape ideas have influenced artistic tendencies of landscape painting, we will compare the artistic philosophies of the Western painter and the Shan Shui artists in the East. What we search for is the place in an artist's mind rather than in the pictorial transcript.

Before we go further, several key terms in the following discussion need to be defined.

Classical means relating to the art of ancient Greece and Rome, and of High Renaissance artistic ideas, which, in Winckelmann's words, "should aim at noble simplicity and calm grandeur." [1]

classic: in this text, it generally refers to the fine art both of the West and East that is recognized, unquestioned and traditional.

anti-classical: of artistic trends which refuse to follow Classicism and emphasize individuality or sense of place, etc.

¹ Kenneth Clark (1986): *The Romantic Rebellion*, p.20.



Mannerist: the follower of the classical masters of High Renaissance in art technique rather than ideas.

Mannerism: the artistic stance and manner of the Mannerists.

romantic: (as a general term) of artistic manner depicting emotion by strong imagination, locality and other sorts of intense sentiment.

Romantic: Artist who holds and embodies the romantic stance.

Romanticism: the art movement initiated in 18th century England. It is the key idea of the English School of landscape design and art.

Scholar Painting (also **Xeyi** painting): a kind of Chinese intellectual art which shows great interest in depicting intensive feelings by use of brush and ink rather than recording real image.

3.1 IDEAS AND PICTURES

With no idea, or aesthetic position, there can be no landscape painting. Even the most commercial painter who sees painting as a commodity has to assume the taste of his potential patrons. In this case we may reason that the painter has done a little “aesthetic research”, at least he has studied why people like a certain picture, then buy it. Even Van Gogh once tried to sell a landscape painting, but unfortunately there was no communication between his art and audience during the period. Though the consequence may be very disappointing, there is one crucial lesson in the painting business; that is to achieve an aesthetic consensus between audience and painter. Obviously the aesthetic consensus stands on different levels according to different social groups. Popularity is, of course, not the absolute measure for criticizing art; high aesthetic ideals have made the lonely painter die poor or mentally ill, as in the case of Van Gogh and Blake. However, the honest feeling of life, the specific way of



operating the human function of seeing was there. Eventually this will be understood, and the pictorial outcome of their ideas will become appreciated.

Seeing is not a simple biological action. It is manipulated by thoughts, influenced by emotion. In any civilized society, ways of seeing is somehow trained or conditioned by certain cultural rules. Therefore, when we discuss the way people appreciate things, in particular landscape, the topic cannot be narrowed to the study of single object or scenery: the action of appreciation encompasses a wide range of relevant issues. The basic elements of visual art such as form, colour, texture, scale, composition or artistic atmosphere, etc., register different individual ways of expression in a completed art work. Meanwhile one's mood (or mental state), the most changeable factor, particularly for a painter, has a great influence on the mode of expression. Evidently human artistic responses to landscape are culturally different, though the starting point might almost be the same shown in primitive arts. Landscape painting is not simply a portrait of the outside world, but the selected, edited images that indirectly show beliefs and desires, and explain the feelings which enable them to absorb natural beauty.

When facing a landscape, a painter's response is a very complicated process. He may internalize the landscape in his own mind by intuition or by rational thinking, or by both. What interests us are the ideas behind the pictorial images and the ways a painter approaches the picture. The places which exist in the minds of the Western and Eastern painters have produced very different landscape paintings which provide not only references for pure artistic matters, but also important material for us in our study of landscape aesthetics. Landscape observed by artists may be of a more general perception, since artists in any culture use their refined visual materials to reflect the basic human aesthetic responses to natural beauty and the ways of seeing and analysing them. With a picture, landscape painting is an arrangement of the features which describe the



relationship between natural and man-made things. As a kind of visual language it can be used to communicate an attitude towards nature and what is felt towards the immediate environment. Thus, landscape painting, to some extent, records the changes in human outlook throughout the world, a philosophy written in a pictorial language.

As Geoffrey Grigson wrote in 1975: “we may reasonably say that the landscape in the frame — and in the reproduction — is an extra revelation, an extra intensification, rather than an invention.” [2] A painting serves as two-dimensional visual material which brings into focus a certain part of environment. It can also demonstrate certain meanings or reveal certain values as long as it is appreciated with understanding and reasoning, i.e. with ideas which make sense of a place. Thus, landscape painting presents refined images of a selected and appreciated place and explains the ideas behind the images.

3.2 QUALITY OF LANDSCAPE PAINTING

As a tool of communication, a specific language, landscape painting has its accent on the quality of communication. On this quality, Herbert Read once suggested that it is **essentially romantic**, “to give a more definite name to the quality that distinguishes landscape painting, I think it would have to be called ‘poetry’.” [3] The key to using the poetic and pictorial language is to analyze and organize the images of scenery for conveying ideas and emotions. Thus, we cannot simply define a landscape painting as a picture of land (or environment). Few of us will be satisfied with this simple definition, since there is a great deal of human

2 Geoffrey Grigson (1973): *Britain Observed*, p.10.

3 Herbert Read: *The Meaning of Art*, p.161.



participation in the act of making and appreciating landscape; even in the age when pictures were used to record references or information about places for direct utility, the paintings were still more alive than those produced by a camera.

A portrait of a place is like that of a person: the soul and the spirit is alive in the images and this spirit, which we call the genius of place, is the essence of landscape painting. The quality of communication between audience and picture is also as important as that between the portrait and the person when valuing the quality of the painting. Therefore we can understand why people from different cultures compare landscape painting with poetry. [4] What is more, landscapes are usually not wholly natural and cannot be totally separated from the traces left by human activities. Landscape and human beings are an entity; to the end, human is a part of nature. If landscape painting, “as the word suggests, deals with an artist’s reactions to the land,” [5] the quality of the painting must depend on who the artists are and their cultural background and philosophical stance. It is just like a well known Chinese saying: “The writing is as the person.” We may reason that landscape painting is almost a mirror of the painter’s mind.

It is true that “There is really no such a thing as Art. There are only artists.” [6] As the result of artistic creation, even that of the most cautious naturalist, the painting is certainly a subjective outcome, since without refinement and arrangement by human efforts there is no way of achieving any piece of work we call art.

Landscape painters, according to their own understanding, paint what they think is worth devoting their life to. The selected and edited images, of course, should be desirable, enjoyable and expressive. A good

4 Also, a Chinese saying: “The sentiment of poem is the conception of the picture (landscape painting).” We shall discuss this in detail in the following chapter.

5 Bo Jeffares (1979): *Landscape Painting*, Phaidon Press Limited, Oxford, p.11.

6 E. H. Gombrich: *The Story of Art*, Phaidon, London. 1984, p.4.



painter must be a good thinker, dreamer, or some sort of idealist. A good landscape painting must show all the qualities of the artist.

Landscape, in a broad sense, may be seen as a **Placescape** by which the painter demonstrates knowledge of a particular place and reveals the feeling and emotion evoked by it. We appreciate the result as art, but the place itself provokes consideration. Our responses to pictorial places are complicated: we may like or even want to live in the place depicted in a painting, since it is so lyrical, peaceful and harmonious; we may feel distanced with certain pictures or only admire them, since they are so sacred and remote; we are sometimes even frightened by some pictures since the horrible images, the vital force of nature depicted in them, overwhelms us.

But instinctively the wish for a good life is the primary human desire. So-called paradise is rightly the most desirable place in the dreams of people, and the ideal picture for a painter. Almost the whole history of landscape painting has a continuous link with the conjured-up ideal world; even the pictures which evoke some sort of negative feeling, are still related to the basic ideal of a beautiful life. In a passive way, they strengthen the spirit, by recognizing the 'truth' or reality of the tragedies and changes in a disturbed world. Thus, they show the value of peace and the need to balance the inner ambivalence through either a sensitive or romantic approach.

Differing from sculpture and architecture, painting is a pure two-dimensional art. The dimensional restriction forces a painter to develop their imagination freely and even wildly. On the other hand, this characteristic makes the painting even more like a poem; it may be more abstract, subjective, expressive than the picture itself. Since the painting conveys intensive emotions and strong feelings, to produce it demands the capacity to imagine, create and control the balance between outward formal expression and inner feeling. It involves both intelligence and



emotion. To do this is much more elusive than to simply define space and time or distinguish figures through technique.

Although a landscape painting can be idealistic, romantic or realistic, eventually it is an reflection of human desire: the desire to find beauty in nature and life. As a desirable image, a painted landscape also involves a strong sense of “design”. The action of creating an atmosphere on a two-dimensional surface needs an intellectual device for composing, editing and arranging the aspects. Whatever the purpose of the painting, it needs some management of design.

In short, making a landscape is not purely record taking, though it has an inseparable bond with the objective world. The quality of the painting arises from the painter’s attitudes to life, ideas, capacity of imagination, even the technique of painting; the skill of using the painting media and the technique of designing. The subjective factor is so influential that painting as a kind of creation has been linked to ideas such as symbol, fantasy, ideal, reason and so on. [7] A good portrait can tell the story of a person; a good landscape painting can also reveal the soul of a place and a nation, and the key to person’s beliefs. But a portrait is only a communication between people, whereas a landscape painting also communicates between people and place. Therefore, there is no doubt that the idea of landscape painting is as profound as that of poetry in relating our living environment to its down-to-earth meanings. Again, compared with architecture and sculpture, painting is relatively less constrained by material; the ideas are expressed through the action of drawing, almost in the manner of “writing”. [8] Thus, the quality of landscape painting can be imaginative, lyrical, philosophical and abstract as well. That is why Shan Shui painting was classified as a first class art in ancient China.

7 The categories used by Kenneth Clark in his book *Landscape in Art*.

8 The Chinese description of making painting is “writing”, and the source of painting and writing is seen as the same. Also see following Chapters.



3.3

THE ESSENTIALS OF LANDSCAPE PAINTING

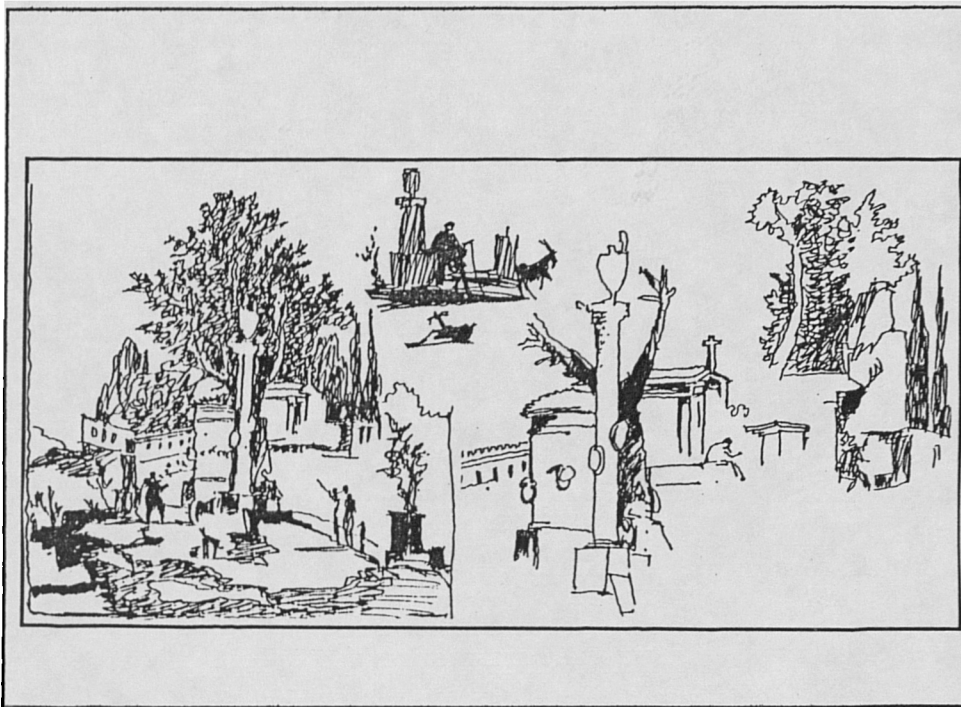


Fig 3-1: BASIC ELEMENTS OF A LANDSCAPE PAINTING: Landforms, Vegetation, Animal, Human activities and Buildings (in proper scale) ['Rural Landscape' (detail) from Hellenistic wall painting from the Villa of Agrippa Postumus at Boscotrecase, first quarter of first century AD.]

Landscape as a theme in Western visual art has not been as independent as the long tradition in Eastern art; when tracing back to the three great pre-classical civilizations of Mesopotamia, Egypt and the Aegean, landscape usually served as a background to human activities such as battles, hunting, gathering, fishing, farming, etc.. According to Enzo Carli: "The great leap from these simple natural references to true landscape painting comes with 'Hellenistic Art'. The typical example is the 'Rural Landscape' (detail) from Hellenistic wall painting from the



Villa of Agrippa Postumus at Boscotrecase (first quarter of first century AD).” [9]

In almost all the books on Chinese art history, the painting ‘Touring in Spring’ by Zhan Zichen (East Jin Dynasty, about the end of 4th century AD) is seen as the first complete Shan Shui (landscape) painting in China. Why is this so? Is there something universal in defining the characteristics of a landscape painting? As Enzo Carli explained: in the ‘rural landscape’, “an idyll scenery of realistic life seems represented.” However, with a picture the Chinese painter has clearly defined proportions for composing a landscape painting. According to the rules of Shan Shui painting, the proportional scheme is: “A Zhan, is the mountain; a Chi, the tree; a Cun, the horse; a fen, the man.” [10] Thus, as in Western art also, human activities are limited but not necessarily eliminated. Essentially, the human must be a part of, and belong to, the scenery, which results either from a natural process or from human efforts. In other words, the most impressive images of a landscape picture should be a kind of atmosphere which looks natural, but reveals human participation in a subtle way [Fig. 3-1].

The objects represented in landscape paintings are varied and may be either scenery of pure nature (wild nature) or human-made things (such as townscape), or a mixture of the two. Using an abstract technical expression, we may state that: any kind of landscape painting must represent a composite scene showing an appreciable relationship between soft and hard elements such as mountain and water, land form and vegetation, built environment and its natural surroundings, behind which human emotions and ideas participate and operate. According to this understanding, we can appreciate why the Chinese prefer and still make

9. Enzo Carli (Edited by Mia Cinotti, 1980): *The Landscape in Art*, William Morrow and Company, New York, p.23.

10 The Chinese measurement: a Cun = 1.3123 inch, a Chi = 1.0936 feet, a Zhan = 3.6465 yard, a Fen = 1/10 Cun.



sense to use the symbolic term 'Shan Shui' (mountain and water) to describe all landscape painting.

Over time, the objects painted cover a wide range of images. The images vary from painter to painter, from place to place and can be pure natural scenery, townscape, or any environment in which humans live or work, as in the concept of **Placescape**. Therefore, it is not as important for us to clarify which kind of scenery should appear in the painting. More crucial here is whether a balance between nature and human beings can be achieved by the pictorial device, whether the ideas and emotions evoked by the scenery are truly revealed.

Thus, the essentials of landscape painting are not only in relation to what kind of scenery has been painted, but to what is implied in the picture. Mountain, water, vegetation or human shelter do not make sense by themselves; light, perspective and colour are only physical things. Only after combining them in a specific atmosphere, organized in a particular relationship and expressed with deeper feeling and true emotion by the skillful brush work or other media, may a painted scenery be eventually **felt** by painter and audience, and the painting therefore gains its life. To some extent, to feel (to find emotion in) a landscape is as important as to see it.

Yet, we cannot define the essentials of landscape painting as depending only on how big the mountain and water is, and what proportions the tree, the animal and human figure should be. What is important is whether the locality, the cultural background, the human desires, belief and feeling is revealed in the painting. Again as Geoffrey Grigson once suggested: "The story of European landscape is part of the story of yesterday's introversion of man's interest from himself-in-god to himself-in-nature, which has been followed by today's sequel of man for



himself, as far as art goes, without god or nature.” [11] The whole changing process is linked to that of ideas — the core of Landscape Aesthetics [Fig. 3-2 and 3-3].

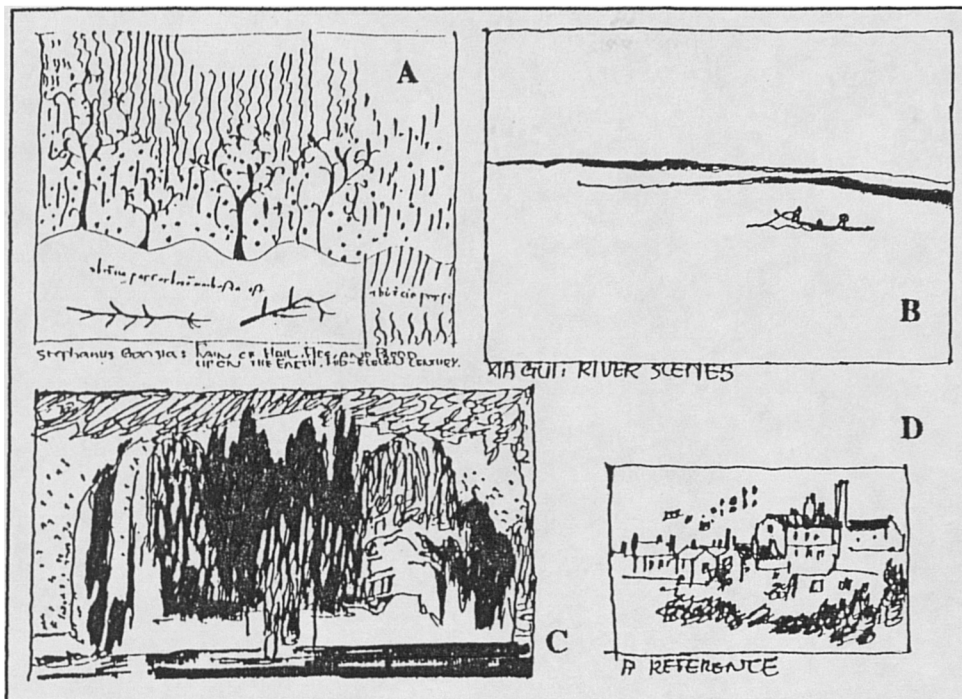


Fig. 3-2: IDEA, MOOD AND LANDSCAPE IMAGES: A: a symbolic depiction; B: a lyrical image; C: a picture of horror; D: a pictorial record.

11 Geoffrey Grigson (1975): *Britain Observed*, p.12, Phaidon Press Limited, London.

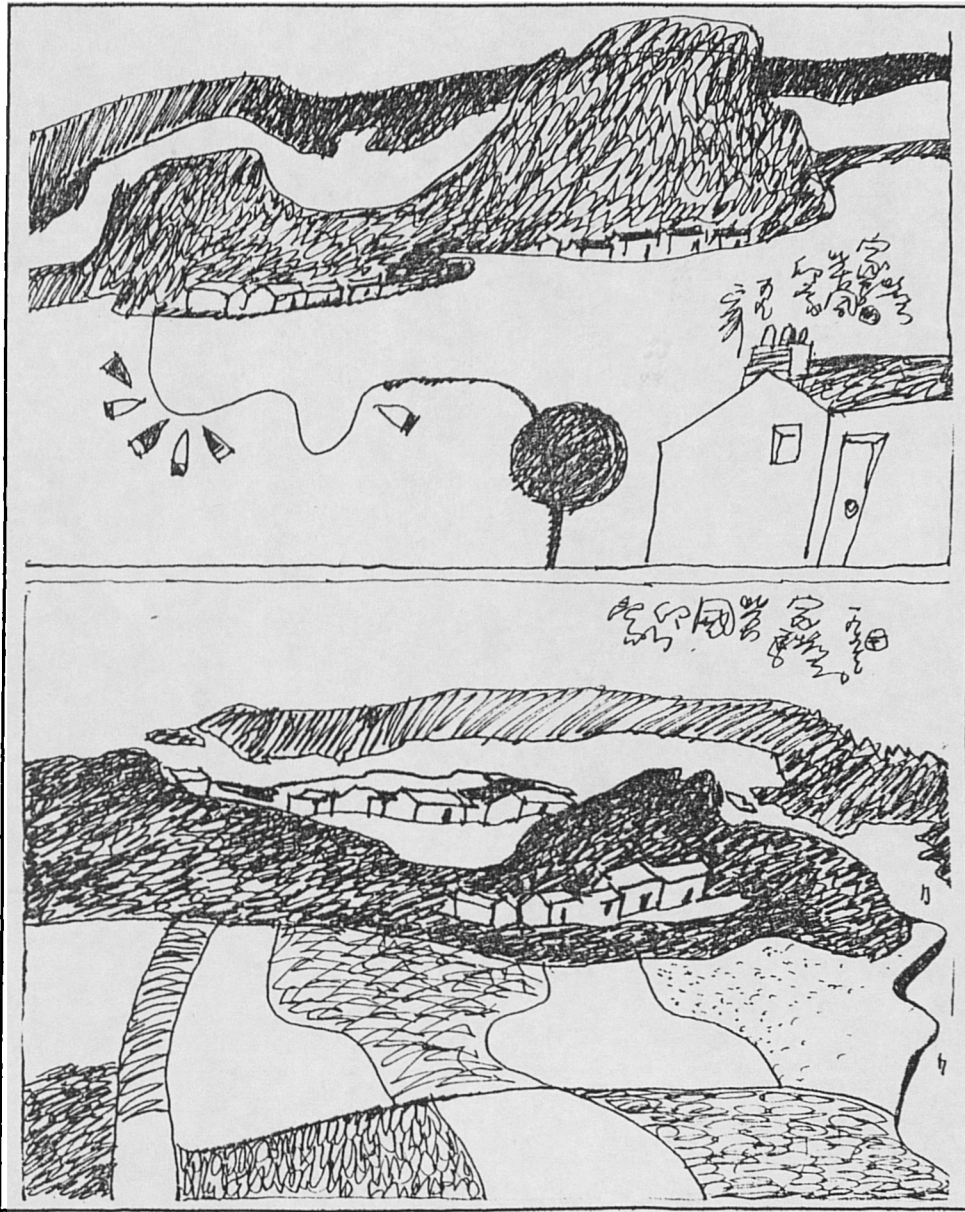
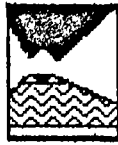


Fig. 3-3: IDEA AND LANDSCAPE PAINTING: Painting with understanding, 'The Impression of England' by Jiahua Wu, 1992.



4

LANDMARKS OF WESTERN ART

If the story of European landscape is part of the story of yesterday's introversion of man's attitude towards nature, the discussion here should aim at searching for an understanding of the change of landscape ideas and its influences on this art practice.

Compared with Eastern landscape painting, the history of Western landscape painting is either discontinuous or complicated. This kind of painting emerged relatively late in the history of European art following its earlier classical beginning. Landscape was not seen as an independent object for art's sake, but a complementary factor in the background of those pictures about life, death and religious themes. According to Kenneth Clark (1976), the first surviving landscapes, in the modern sense, are in frescoes of 'Good and Bad Government' by the Italian painter **Ambrogio Lorenzetti** (first heard of 1319-48).^[1] According to Herbert Read (1965), the earliest mention of landscape as a separate branch of painting was Dürer's reference in 1521 to his friend **Joachim Patinir** (c. 1480-1524) as "Joachim the good landscape painter." Thus we may say that real landscape painting appeared in the late Gothic and early Renaissance period, when Western European painters rediscovered links with classical tradition. The linkage between Hellenistic art and later developments which had broken for centuries was remade in the Renaissance.

¹ Kenneth Clark, *Landscape into Art*, John Murray, London 1949, 1986, p.9.



4.1 PRIMITIVISM

Before we go further, a very interesting topic worth discussing here is that of primitivism. When discussing Virgil's inspiration for the ideal landscape Kenneth Clark suggests: "His works show a first-hand knowledge of the country, and many good humanists, from Petrarch onwards, managed his estate on the advice of the *Georgics*. But this element of realism is combined with the most enchanting dream which has ever consoled mankind, the myth of a Golden Age in which man lived on the fruits of the earth, peacefully, piously and with primitive simplicity. This conception of the early history of mankind is the exact opposite to that which produced the landscape of fantasy, and is I believe, known by sociologists as 'soft primitivism' as opposed to 'hard primitivism'." [2] Here, Clark has made an interesting point that human imagination of landscape may have a connection with his assumptions about primitive life. In terms of the quality of life of early mankind, we know little about primitive ideas of art, since we lack evidence and knowledge for reasoning or analyzing. Reviewing the landscape pictures made before and after the Renaissance, we find that some of the landscapes show the places which are lyrical, peaceful, fruitful, and which we can agree are 'soft' such as the so-called 'Classical Landscape', the landscape images in southern Europe; some of them, on the other hand, are associated with images of wildness, darkness, bleakness of nature, and even look frightening such as landscapes by the painters living in northern Europe; they may be regarded as examples reflecting the 'hard' primitivism. However, there is a third category and that is the landscape between the two extremes, a

2 Kenneth Clark, *Landscape into Art*, p. 109.



'compromise landscape image' — a world totally beyond our experience, neither 'hard' nor 'soft', but a vision set up by Christian faith, a symbolic depiction of landscape.

4.2

A SYMBOLIC DEPICTION OF CHRISTIAN FAITH

Life was very hard in the Middle Ages. Human beings struggled on the land, and dreamt about paradise on the other shore, a world made by God. The word paradise in Hebrew is *parde*; in Persian, *pairidaeza*; in Greek, *paradeisos*; it means beautiful park, or garden where the biblical Adam and Eve lived when they were innocent. Sinful human beings are punished by God by being made to struggle in the life of reality. Bearing this in mind, they must try hard to be "innocent" again, to return to the paradise lost: that is the whole idea of Christianity. Thus, in an era when Christianity became the dominating thought, people embodied this religious idea by rejecting reality, destroying the art of the pagan. Beliefs influencing attitudes towards landscape were so strong that artistic tendencies and way of seeing were changed, and the change of landscape images was inevitable. Ideas at this time formed a duality which, on the one hand, negated the dynamic role of humans to strive for a better living, and on the other hand, promoted tremendous potential for conjuring up the enchanting, imaginative visions of the religious realm. Gothic architecture, for example, is essentially different from that of Greek and Roman, and truly a wonderful creative work of art, a rarely seen gem in the treasure of human culture. It is said this was inspired by God, yet it is actually a pure earthly creation.

Unfortunately the situation of landscape painting was not as inspiring as that of architecture, since nature was no longer the playground



of God's "sinful children". Nor was it a source of delights of earthly life, but a manifestation of divine power. If there is beauty it must mirror the holy spirit, otherwise nothing was worth being admired; the reality was understood as physical beings in chaos. Thus in the pictures depicting stories from Christianity the landscape as a background was either totally disordered, bleak and dangerous or remarkably organized, enclosed to symbolize the place of evil or to parallel the place representing the immutable perfection of God's creation.

Is there anybody who really knows paradise? The answer to the question, "what is paradise like", had to be given by the craftsmen who painted pictures such as the 'Garden of Eden'. The imagination of the painter in the Middle Ages grew to the highest level, and the landscape in the minds of the painters are almost "**designed**" images which are two-dimensional, a little abstract and full of detail, creative and original. This art, to some extent, looked forward to the initiation of the tradition of European gardening. For the artists, in fact for all the craftsmen, there was only one task: to help tell the religious stories. Yet it provided an opportunity for them to invent a system of symbolic visual language and a chance to "design" a place called a garden as well, since the images painted were eventually controlled by those artists.

With the use of visual language, along the change of artistic style from Byzantine or Romanesque to high Gothic, the artists gave little importance to personality or locality. Universally all the art seems to show an international flavour. With their modest manner and delicate craftsmanship they developed a new art to satisfy their own imagination. The artists recognized the significance of a pure art language, and used it to serve their belief, but also to release themselves from their hard life, indirectly revealing a subjective human ability to cope with reality.

In short, the ideas and faith of people in this era shaped the landscape in their minds. Their pictures demonstrated that to paint the landscape is the right way to approach the ideal of life — living in the



Paradise. In terms of imagination, the dynamic capacity of imaging displayed by the artists in the Middle Ages is much finer than mere mechanical realism ^[3] [Fig. 4-1].

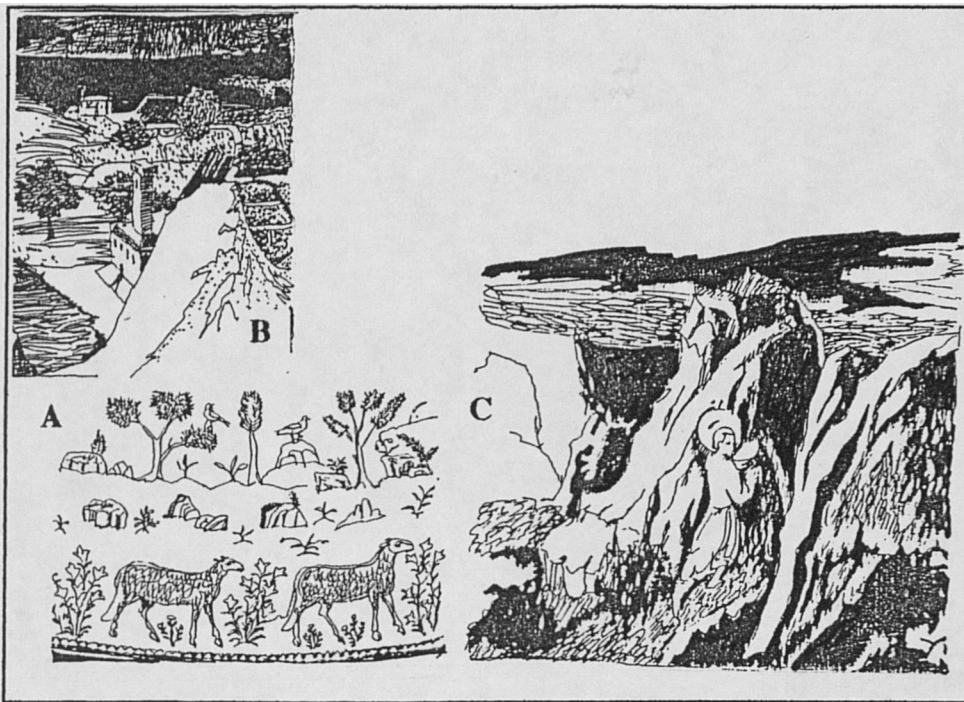


Fig. 4-1: A: Two dimensional images in Byzantine mosaic by unknown artist, before 549; B: The composition of 'Castle On A Lake' by Ambrogio Lorenzetti (first heard of 1319-48); C: 'The Young Saint John Going into The Wildness' (painted c. 1450-60) by Giovanni Di Poalo.

3 The mechanical imitators of nature seem to have had great difficulty with real communication with nature; they were like slaves of objects. They lacked the strength of the classical hero; they lacked the intelligence which Renaissance masters had; and had no courage to show their real feeling and emotion as the Romantics did.

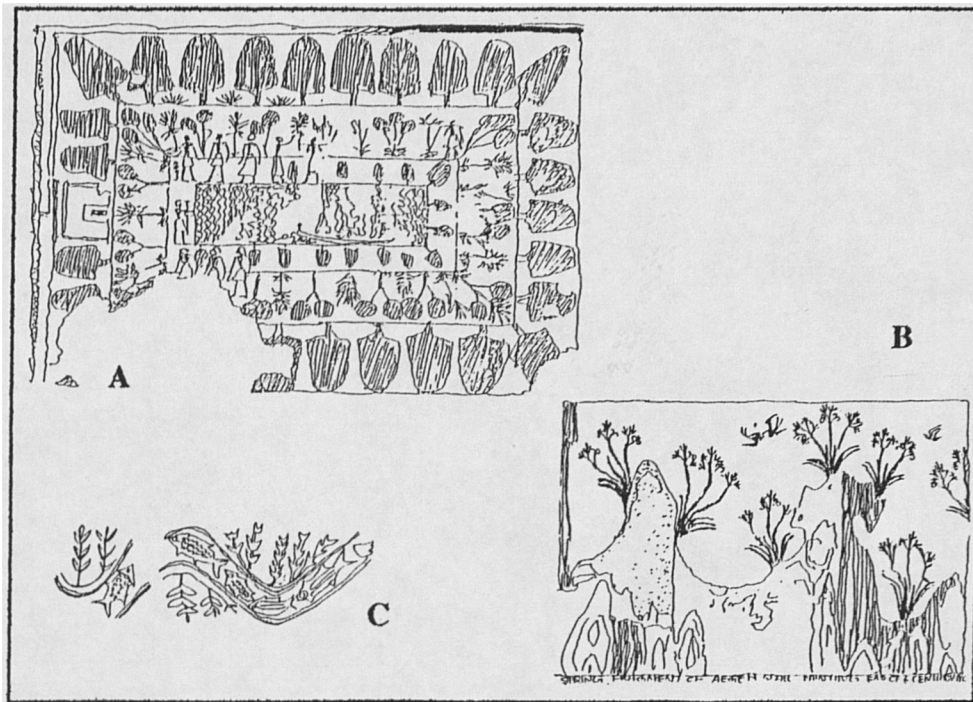


Fig. 4-2: THE ROOTS OF WESTERN LANDSCAPE ART: A: Egyptian garden with symmetrical plan; B: Spring (Birds and Flowers) in Aegean Wall painting, end of 16th century BC; C: The Patterns of Mesopotamia decorations: River between Trees, Mesopotamia design for a seal from Susa, 3000-2900 BC. [illustrations with reference to Enzo Carli (Edited by Mia Cinotti, 1980), *The Landscape in Art*, William Morrow and Company, New York, p.20, p.14].

4.3 ALONG THE CLASSICAL ROAD

In the Renaissance [4], what had been lingering in the mind of artists was still that old question: what is the image of good human life. They were thinking, searching for the truth, the future, and at the same

4 The discussion developed here, is mainly focused on the issues which relate to the ideas of landscape painting



time looking back to the splendid past of the Romans and Greeks. Classical antiquity and the spiritual heritage of Virgil had provided a key reference for them to achieve the ideal realm by a pictorial language. In European minds, the life of early human was thought to be lyrical, relaxing and harmonious. They went along the classical road to create their ideal landscape, although the roots of European landscape painting might be traced back as early as the three early western civilizations [Fig. 4-2]. [5]

The new version of the human ideal was Humanism which had gradually replaced the more remote religious dream of a marvelous life after death. To explore the richness of real life, to find tangible beautiful things in nature, motivated the artists. Therefore, to look out the window or enclosure, to study the real past through discovered antiquities, was extremely attractive to the thinkers, scholars and artists at the early stage of the Renaissance.

With the dissatisfaction of the symbolic way of depiction, the scope of these painters extended beyond the medieval garden to the general landscape, townscape and the ruins left by the Romans. For the people in this age, landscape became something more real and substantial.

It was also a logical desire to define the space with some effective device. Therefore, the delicate details of Gothic art were replaced by the images defined by the intellectual device: the technique of perspective which was invented by a Classical artist, a Florentine architect, **Filippo Brunelleschi** (1337-1446). Using his discovery of perspective, the Landscape behind the human figures in the paintings was gradually organized by the new spatial framework. The artists were delighted with

5 As we can see in the Illustrations, **1. Garden Scene: with a boat on lake** Egyptian wall painting, first half of 15th century BC. Thebes, Tomb of the Vizier Rekhmire. **2. Spring:** fragment of Aegean wall painting, end of 16th century BC., From Santorini (ancient Thera); 0.21m x 1.86m. Athens, National Museum. **3. Birds and Flowers:** Detail from fresco in the house of Livia at Prima Porta, first half of first century AD. Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano. Landscape was occasionally recorded by the early artists.



their revelation: “What a sweet thing perspective is” exclaimed another Florentine, **Paolo Uccello** (1397-1475), when he was asked to go to bed by his wife, [6] although the perspective was not as scientific as people thought [7] [Fig. 4-3].

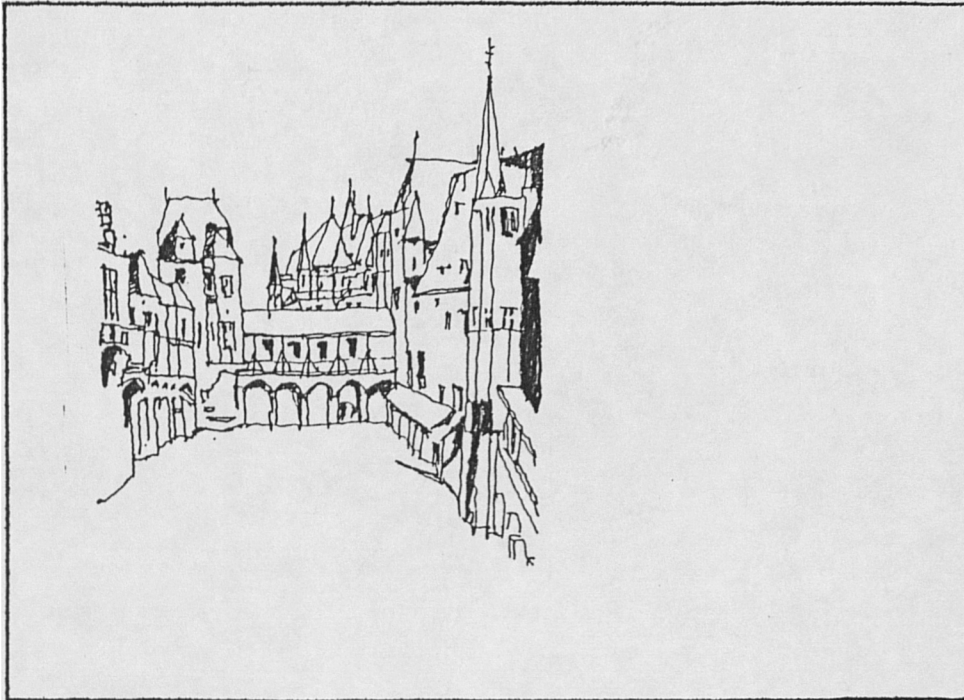


Fig. 4-3: PERSPECTIVE, A DEVICE FOR DEFINE SPACE: Dürer’s Castle Courtyard. (INNSBRUCK?) in 1494 shows an uncompromising view of defining the space of a townscape with perspective device.

6 Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, P.190.

7 The shortcomings of perspective even gave Brunelleschi difficulties in coping with the sky behind his architectural rendering. Moreover, because of the formula of perspective, the artists lost the freedom in making painting and found difficulty in recording the enchanting details of nature as the medieval artists did. Meanwhile, in East, the Chinese painter, on the other hand, devised their own system which was extremely helpful for artist to define space, express their imagination even freely.

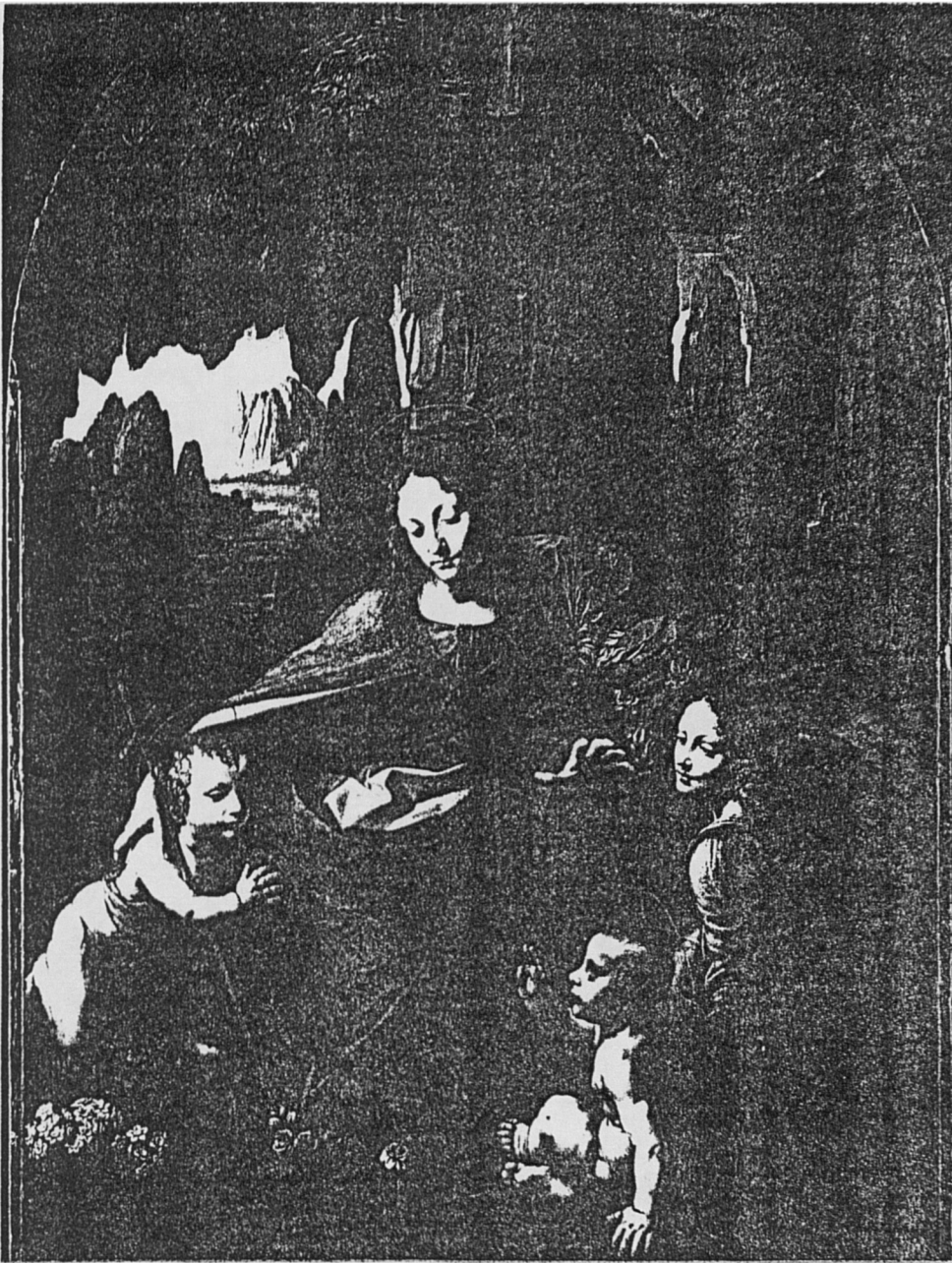


Fig. 4-4: Leonardo da Vinci (1452 - 1519): The Virgin of the Rocks (c. 1508), The National Gallery, London.



Among the Florentine artists in the late 15th century, **Sandro Botticelli** (1446-1510) changed the Christian legend through a classical myth; Gothic icons transformed by the marvelous figure of Venus. The beauty of Venus symbolized the rediscovery of the human body. Thus, a logical task for the painters was to re-discover the real background for the lovely nudes and their events from down to earth life. So the real landscape was closely observed.

It was in the early 16th century, the period we call High Renaissance of South Europe, that fine art was full of intellectual inquisitiveness and personal pride. The Renaissance artists wanted to know how the world was structured and worked and how capable they were in expressing themselves. Thus, by endless exploratory drawings, they portrayed and analyzed the world with extraordinary intensity and by using perspective, the positions and spaces of objects were rationally connected. The great man **Leonardo da Vinci** (1452-1519), whose standing and position both as a scholar and an artist had furthered the study of the new landscape, showed his ability by his drawings and paintings such as 'The Virgin of Rocks (c. 1508) [Fig. 4-4] and 'Mona Lisa' (painted about 1502). In the paintings he embodied a profound understanding of landscape and human form (through observation of nature such as the structure of rocks and the anatomical study of the human body). His imagination was based on a precise knowledge of perspective, structures of natural scenery, human bodies and the subtle mood of his figure. Leonardo once noted: "Mountains, in consequence of the great quantity of atmosphere between your eyes and them, will appear blue." [8] This demonstrates that he started to see landscape with sense of spatial depth, time and the so-called environmental colour. For him nature

8. Enzo Carli (Edited by Mia Cinotti), *The Landscape in Art*, William Morrow and Company, New York, 1980, p.65



was not an isolated painting unit but a changeable and colourful alive entity inspiring the artistic creation.

However, to understand the world and then paint it is not the only purpose of art. An intimate homeland and beautiful natural surroundings must be painted with richness and passion. Unlike Leonardo or other masters such as **Michelangelo Buonarroti** (1475-1546) and **Raphael Santi** (1483-1520), the Venetian painters made a very special contribution to the development of the landscape painting which related their passion for real life.

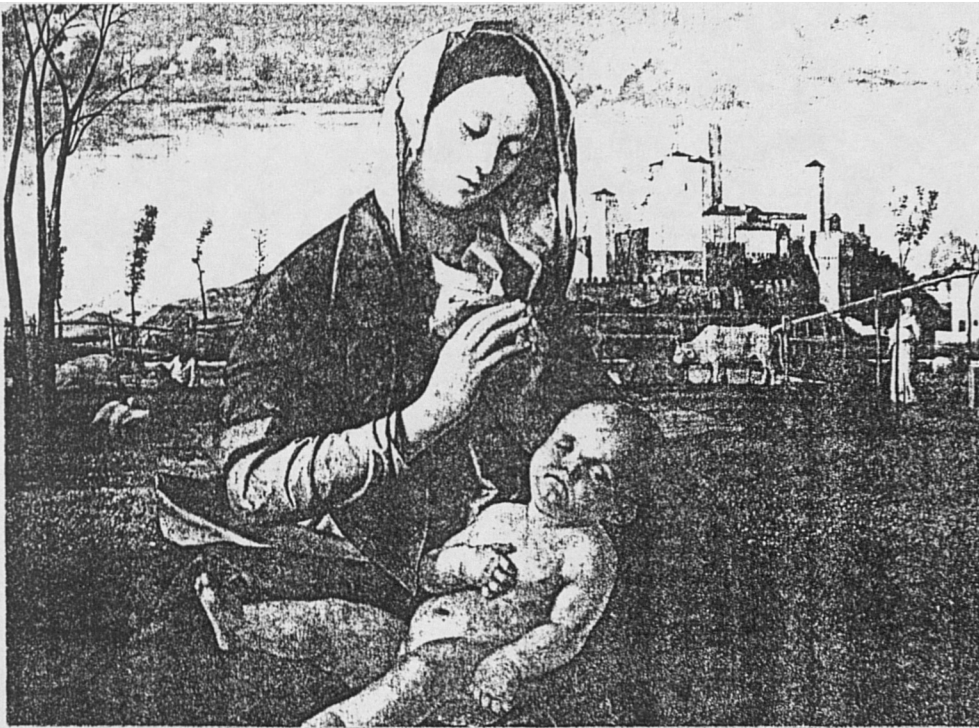


Fig. 4-5: From Landscape painted for God to that for early leaving: Giovanni Bellini (1431?-1516): *The Madonna of the Meadow* (1500-5?), The National Gallery, London.

Venice was a prosperous place. The painters instinctively inherited the Byzantine tradition, particularly reflected in the colourful mosaic



works. Although the Renaissance was late in coming, their paintings were just like the San Marco Piazza where every beautiful thing co-existed harmoniously, revealing an especially remarkable lyrical landscape sense. This was an extremely valuable progression that foreshadowed the great future of independent landscape painting and had a direct linkage to the so-called **Ideal Landscape** in 17th century Italy — the most influential landscape tendency in Europe. As landscape painting increased in importance, tiny landscape backgrounds formerly glimpsed through a window literally grew in size and significance.

Giovanni Bellini (1431?-1516) was a transitional figure between early and high Renaissance and an undoubted master who transferred the landscape from that for God to that of human. In his painting, everything fits into his designed visions and yet each detail was readable and of precision. The painting 'Madonna of the Meadow' is the typical example demonstrating not only a curiosity of the Renaissance mind, but also a self-knowledge, i. e. where they really belong, and what has been done to the earth. Although the theme here was still the 'Virgin and Child', the space is much more open, and the colour looks brilliant and real. For instance, behind the triangular composition of the figures of Virgin and Child, a real townscape and a farm is represented realistically. In his earthly paradise, nothing is wild, the land is of the cultivated men who are "very much a part of the civilized world." [9] [Fig. 4-5] Another revealing picture by Bellini is his 'Allegory of Soul' in which the daily life of people and their surroundings (including some parts of wild scenery) are depicted by way of contrasting to the formally structured low part of the painting. Here landscape had, from the religious background, become

9 "The central triangle composing the Madonna and Child is painted with elaborate care; and Bellini has caught the exact beauty of an Italian town, bare tree, black bird, furrowed field; each object is unique, yet held together in the same mellow light. Bellini's mastery of light, stemming from van Eyck, is an essential part of his genius. The landscape reflecting a wise love of life." (Bo Jeffares: *Landscape Painting*, p.13).



increasingly associated with secular life, proclaiming a shift in interest from divine to earthly living. According to Kenneth Clark, it is the first example of that kind of Venetian painting called 'Poesie'. [10]

A more intensive atmosphere of 'poesies' was revealed in the landscapes made by **Giorgione** (c. 1477-1510). As a master of poetical landscape, Giorgione is said to have learned from Bellini's and inspired by the kind of atmosphere in painting such as the 'Allegory of Souls'. His paintings are admired, but the meanings of the paintings are unclear. It is however the ambiguous attribute of his work that indicates a painting is not necessarily must tell story or convey significant meaning; a painting can exist and be attractive for a landscape's sake, if the figures were needed, they could be painted for a pictorial reason composing an appreciable atmosphere. For instance, no one knows what the painting called '**Tempest**' represents, only "a soldier and gypsy" as Michiel wrote almost in Giorgione's day. [11] There is nothing said about religion, morality, etc., but a lovely picture nevertheless. His composition is loose a little, but the atmosphere is obvious. Although "not more than five paintings can be ascribed with absolute certainty to his hand" [12] we can still appreciate his painting style and trace his influence on landscape art by examining the paintings by his imitator [Fig. 4-6].

What was crucial in Giorgione's mind was the atmosphere, the landscape theme, the mood of 'poesie'. The meaning is vague, but the landscape is lyrical, definitely not a background for narrative but an remote dream. Here, in a **revolutionary change** made by Giorgione, the narrative meaning of painting was replaced by the poetic mood. As Bo Jeffares (1986) remarked "The theme of an ideal landscape was taken up by Giorgione, inheriting Bellini's painting skills and love of light and

10 Kenneth Clark, *Landscape into Art*, p.113-114.

11 Kenneth Clark, *Landscape into Art*, p.115.

12 Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, p.251.



using his master's gifts for lyrical compositions", and "Giorgione's distant, elusive sensuality which pervaded his figures and landscape alike, became not exactly cruder, but certainly more tangible in the hands of his younger Venetian contemporary, **Titian** (Tiziano Vecellio, 1490-1576)." [13]



Fig. 4-6: Nymphs and Children in a Landscape with Shepherds by imitator of Giorgione, The National Gallery, London.

13 Bo Jeffares, *Landscape painting*, p.27.

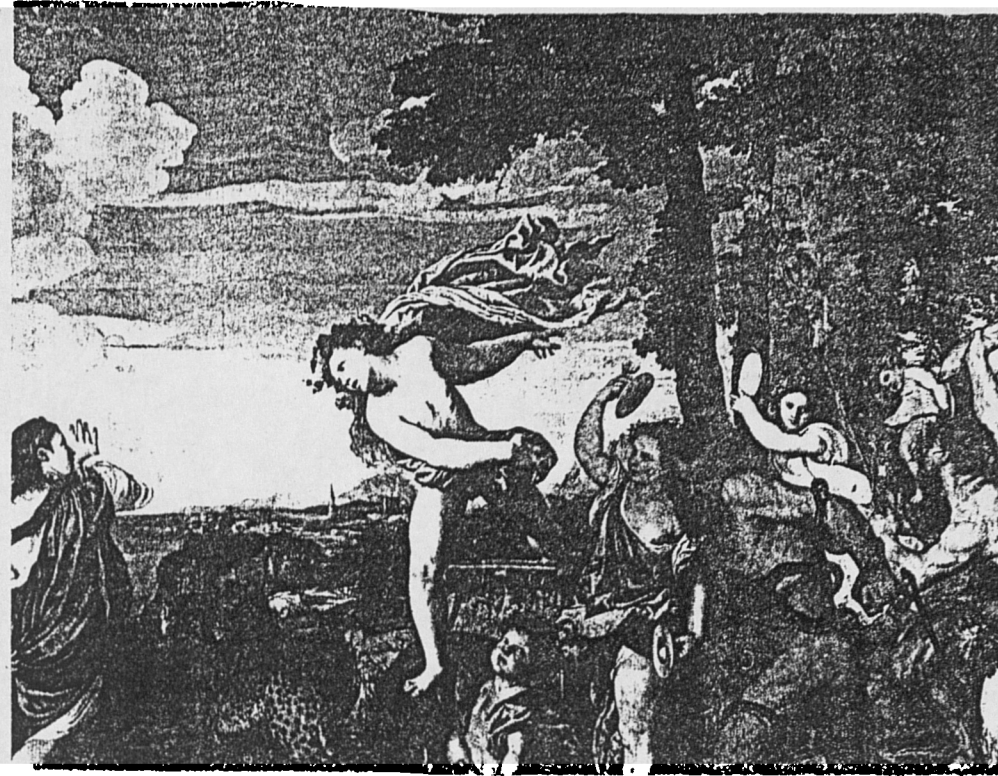


Fig. 4-7: Titian (active 1510-1576): Bacchus and Ariadne, The National Gallery , London.

In contrast to Giorgione, Titian was a powerful painter and seemed less idealistic about landscape, whose nudes are solid and robust. Concentrating on depicting his important themes, he developed his own dictionary of landforms (mountain and rock), sky and cloud, tree and foliage, river and lake, etc. which was a representation of his perception of his native scenery. Although the landscapes are still in the background, all the elements are as real, strong and healthy as his nudes. Compared with Giorgione's gentle atmosphere, Titian's landscape is characterized by his healthy and powerful images of natural life. The powerful tree trunks and weighty foliage seem "to have grown straight out of earth, not out of an idea about the earth." [14] Titian's realistic stance and methods gave his

14 Bo Jeffares (*Landscape Painting*): "Echoes of Titian's landscape vocabulary such as his clump trees, rocky hills, rushing streams and vivid blue hills of his



landscape a timeless life which was copied by the painters of the 17th century and also enlightened the English masters such as Turner and Constable. According to Bo Joffares, phrases, rather than compositions, provided Titian's basic contribution to the development of landscape painting [Fig. 4-7].

Along the classical road artists also found the quality of the past, the life of the contented human and the ideal for their own future, initiating the landscape tendency we call ideal landscape.

4.4 IDEAL LANDSCAPE

Here the term 'Ideal Landscape' refers to the paintings connected with the classical past, and relates to the ideal revealed in the writing of **Virgil** (70-19 BC, Rome), and an ideal life style beyond the secular life. Although it is not religious, it is not quite real. The ideal landscape is not a pure depiction of the beauty of nature, but something idealized to meet the concept of desirable human life, another version of paradise. In this sense, we can hardly find an essential difference between this later idealism and the symbolism of the Middle Ages, since, in a few centuries, humans have not changed much psychologically. The only real difference here was that the Renaissance masters had a remarkable weapon: a rational way of thinking based on close observation by which the truth, the past, the present reality and human potential were explored. They drew conclusions by their own observation and established (or revived) the ideal

native Cadore, reappear in endless landscapes through the ages. It is as though other painters, whatever their current obsessions, could not resist his vivid words and tucked them into own works, just as a host of writers have slipped fragments from Virgil, Dante or Shakespeare into their own book and play."



pattern of life, and organized (or designed) a desirable world with their newly found pictorial language.

Virgil's Elysium is different from the paradise of Eden where humble people, such as the shepherds and their flock are depicted by harmonious colour in a humanized picture in an open and sunny atmosphere. The image declares a common desire to have a idealized setting to satisfy a psychological need: to be mentally peaceful. Virgil's account of the earthly ideal inspired painters such as Claude, Poussin, and thereafter Constable and Pissaro etc. to show through their painting the lasting charm of a rustic kind of beauty.

In order to compose the background of a happy life, a little nostalgic flavour is needed. The images of the past will be related to the 'soft' primitivism mentioned previously which is crucial for conjuring up an optimistic picture of an earlier happy place. For the artists, the classical past provides the right choice of scene. In Kenneth Clark's summary (1986), two poets of antiquity, Ovid and Virgil, furnished the imagination of Renaissance artists. The former was the favorite with figure painters whereas Virgil was thought of as the inspiration for landscape painting. The reason is the myth of ideal rusticity. This ideal dream of the Golden Age was filled with forms and images of classical antiquity, so Virgilian landscape is essentially an evocation of the ancient world. Foreshadowing the new artistic use of these motifs is the beautiful paintings by Giovanni Bellini, Giorgione, Titian and others; the most important figures were two Frenchmen: **Claude Lorrain** (1600-1682) and **Nicolas Poussin** (1594-1665).

Unlike mere imitators of Titian's landscapes such as **Annibale Carracci** (1560-1609), Claude's landscapes were of high originality. Even though they "can appear superficially naive (what childish figures!) and endlessly repetitive (What! another sunset?) but they have a transcendental quality which remains in people's memories even when



they have forgotten the exact contents of his paintings.” [15] What is most important for us is that Claude revealed an aesthetic vocation for making landscapes which were not only lyrical, rustic, but also sublime. His paintings are the ideal, but rooted in his natural consciousness. The infinite water (sea), the vast open space, the dignity of the ruins are not only nostalgic but also provide a glorious vision which can combine real landscape image with ideal. They are not necessarily limited to a particular place like Italy, but could be somewhere universal, maybe England, Wales, or Scotland. [16]

Claude has been thought of as the true heir to the poetry of Giorgione: “Behind these simple-seeming pictures, there was immense amount of preparation. First come from the sketches from nature.” and “Sometimes they are entirely impressionist in their sense of light; sometimes they have a Chinese delicate of accent.” [17] He profited from his industrious observations and meditations, and devoted himself to contemplating natural phenomena such as sunrise and sunset; this enabled him to catch the essence of classical realm for embodying his ideal with varying and poetic painting methods. His study of the beauty of the Romagna Campagna and an understanding of their ravishing beauty, freshness and variety, resulted in an exquisite poetry “where there is never a false note, everything is ‘in Keeping’”. [18] We may consider that the charm of Claude’s landscapes lies in the inviting beauty he experienced and rationally refined.

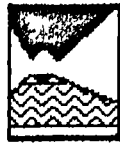
The reason we think of Claude’s landscape as ideal is because of his special way of transforming raw visual materials from the Roman countryside to become a scene in which skies, trees, harbour, mountain

15 Bo Jeffares, *Landscape Painting*, p.27.

16 The idea of Ideal landscape was well developed in Britain We shall discuss that in Part 4: On the English School.

17 Kenneth Clark, *Landscape Into Art*, p.124.

18 Kenneth Clark, *Landscape Into Art*, p.128.



and water somehow become illusory and take on an ideal atmosphere far away from reality. He framed landscape with distance, arranged different elements on the canvas according to his designed composition, controlled the whole so that in its final effect and atmosphere, the result following his own “formula” went beyond the factual scenery.

Taking the spatial arrangement as an example, there are usually three basic layers in his paintings: the first layer is usually a dark shadowed part on one side or another of the painting which goes with the foreground and clouds framing the scope of the perspective; at the second layer, there is a defined prospect, the most important part of his painting such as classical ruins, bridge, fields, and dramatic skies or sea displaying a ideal background for human activities; the third layer dissolves the scenery with great breadth into the remote skies, mountains or water. In our modern sense, this may be regarded as a painting formula (although there are also exceptions), and one may ask why he intentionally repeated the same theme again and again. The answer may be that for the master, representing a certain literal landscape phenomena was not a very important; the art that he was devoted to was Virgil’s paradise [Fig. 4-8].

As a keen observer, Claude also left a very special heritage for the later landscape painters. His sketching technique had given him great freedom to record his observations and compose scenes as he wished and was admired and imitated by the early English water-colourists, especially Alexander Cozens and Gainsborough .

To conclude, the influence of Claude is mainly twofold, firstly, through his ideal landscape approach: framing landscape according to his ideal scope; secondly, through his systematic artificial “design” devices: the bridge, the moving flock, the flowing waters and the classical buildings. Nevertheless, landscapes made by Claude were illusive, for what he sought was still a world in mind.

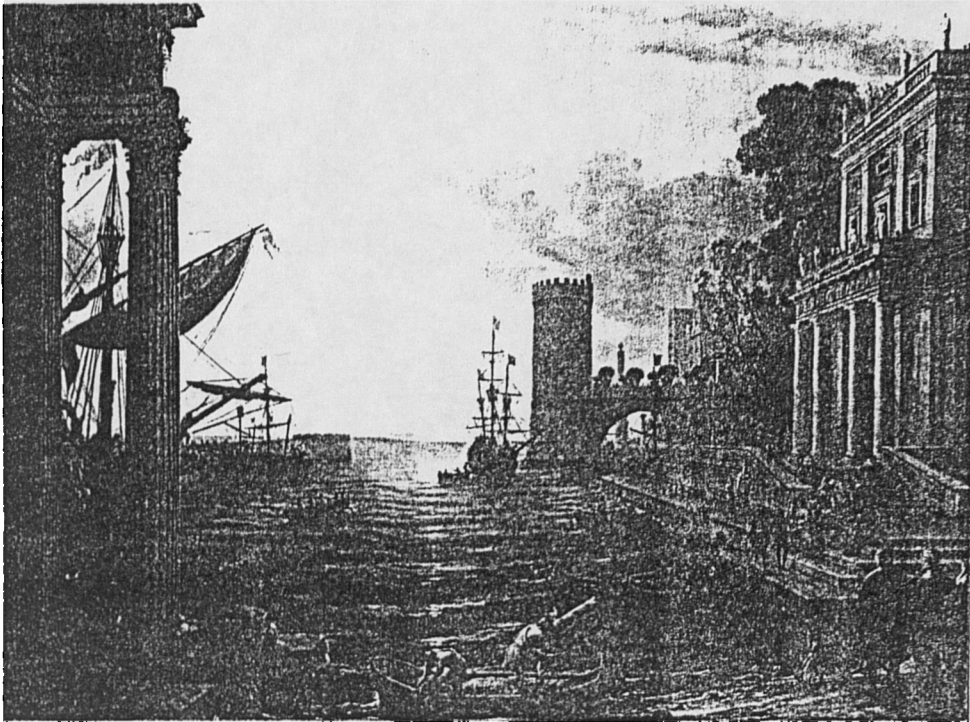


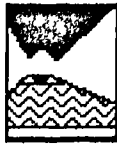
Fig. 4-8: Claude Lorrain (1600-1682): Seaport with Embarkation of Queen of Sheba, The National Gallery, London.

Although he shared a similar landscape attitude with Claude, **Nicolas Poussin** (1594-1665) went even further towards the ideal realm. As a rational thinker and painter, Poussin falls into a more formal world, holding almost the same idea as that of mathematicians who measured the world by a scientific measure. He was indeed the extreme of rationalism in art history. In studying Poussin, the key is to examine his composition, to find out how he perceived his pictures by intelligence and technique.



Fig. 4-9: Nicolas Poussin: 'Landscape with Man Killed by a Snake', The National Gallery, London.

In his paintings the contrast between the verticals and horizontals is critical. First, the tree is a functional vertical structural element, then come classical remains. It is true that the ruins can reveal the mood of nostalgia, but in Poussin's pictures, it is almost a construction element, an important pictorial item which is hard and vertical, functioning along with stone steps and rocks to support the visual structure, to provide a steady and well balanced frame in contrast with the land form, vegetation, etc.. In addition, the winding road and extending water are used as the media to soften contrast, link different pictorial elements from the low part to above, from left to right, unifying the picture. His painting language was so clear that everything is perfectly balanced in the right place and fitted in his favorite central focus perspective. For us he is totally a rational mind, painting not a real landscape but one of relationship and abstraction. From



this point of view, Poussin is more like a designer. He wants to control the 'irregularity of nature'. He did not only frame nature in his pictures but also caused different pictorial elements to frame each other by following mathematical ratios, such as the Golden-section, to achieve a logical order. The strong design tendency behind his use of raw materials from nature made his pictures unmistakable, stable and solid. The paintings of Poussin were almost illustrations of Pythagorean aesthetics — a pure “intellectual exercise” [19] [Fig. 4-9 and Fig. 4-10] . What are alive in his paintings may not be the trees, buildings, or even the figures but his intellect.

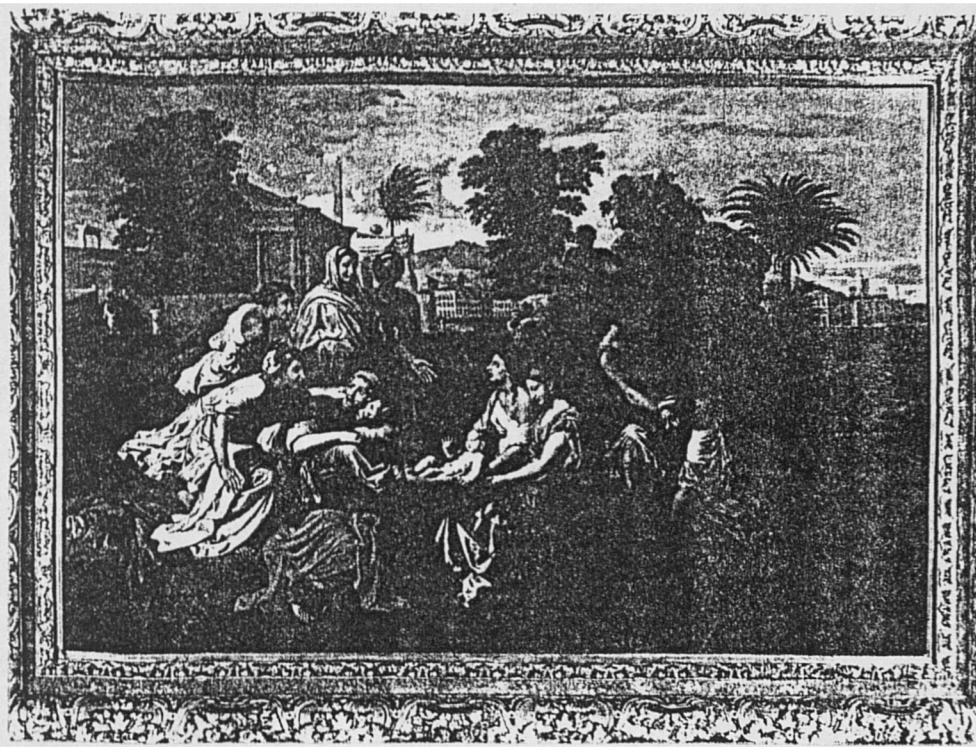


Fig. 4-10: Nicolas Poussin: The Finding of Moses (1651), The National Gallery, London. Poussin's painting — a pure “intellectual exercise” — a balance between the vertical and the horizontal.

19 Bo Jeffares, *Landscape Painting*, phaidon Press Limited, Oxford, 1979, p.30.

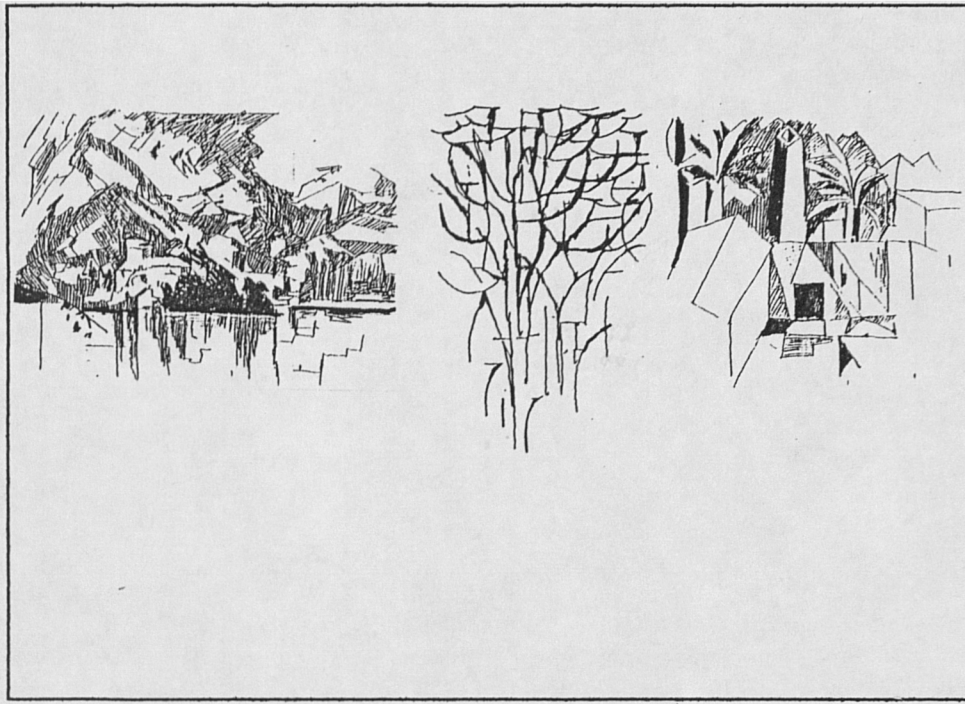


Fig. 4-11: THE GHOST OF POUSSIN HAS HAUNTED WESTERN ARTISTS: from the work of Cézanne, Mondrian and Picasso we can see there the obvious contrast of the vertical to the horizontal, and endless repetition of geometrical themes in landscape they painted.

Poussin is highly valued, not only because of his characteristic landscape features, but also for his unique landscape approach by which rational thinking works consciously to compose desirable landscape images. It was this consciousness that tremendously influenced his successors in the area of landscape art and design. His “design” of landscape art can be seen as the culmination of the evolution of Western landscape art. If we are aware of what has happened in art and design from the 18th to the 20th century, there is no difficulty for us to understand how deeply Poussin’s aesthetic legacy has influenced European art both philosophically and technically. This manner of re-building natural images needs a great capacity to imagine, compose and paint than record



landscape; that is why he is thought to “provide the perfect stepping stone for a study of Northern Romanticism.”^[20] The ghost of his rational composition haunted not only his immediate successors but also those of the 20th century. We can trace the influence of Poussin in the paintings of Corot, Turner, and Pissarro, Cézanne, Mondrian, etc. [Fig. 4-11].

4.5 NORTHERN DELIGHTS

This is a difficult topic since the issues of the so-called northern delights involves not only European art but also some subtle regional differences of culture and of psychological responses to particular living environs. However, to develop the discussion from Classicism to Romanticism, from the art of Italy to that of Britain, I have to take a “risk” by intervening in this troublesome issue, although there may be some debate caused by the limitations of my scope. Here, the term Romantic will be used both as a general term referring to the artistic tendency which are more expressive, dynamic or fantasy and a special term for defining the artistic movement aroused from the northern mood, particular that developed in 18th-19th century English landscape art.

The sun offers a great opportunity to the southerner to see clearly and to distinguish the forms and space, then to depict and define them. However, there may be too much sunlight in southern Europe; it may be possible for people there to abuse the grant of nature and lack high sensibility to the subtlety of light. In contrast, northern people are not as lucky as the southerner; daytime in the North is shorter, the sun light is weaker. It might be true that one always treasures what they rarely have. Thus the lightning of a storm, a rainbow over the field, the darkness of the

20 Bo Jeffares, *Landscape Painting*, p.31.



woods and longer night, the fire of catastrophes and the atmosphere evoked by these natural phenomena became one of the most important themes attracting the eyes of northern artists, and particularly preferred by the Romantics. Also, as a painting medium, light plays a crucial role in modifying space, unifying the whole picture, and working with colour to depict subtle tonal effects creating 'atmosphere', and revealing certain kinds of feelings or moods. Perhaps the frequent change of the weather, the dramatic effects of the light and the experience of hazy surroundings made northern painters examine things closely and represent them with care and sensitivity to detail. We may not be able to prove this scientifically, but the facts recorded in art history support the belief that it is a reasonable assumption.

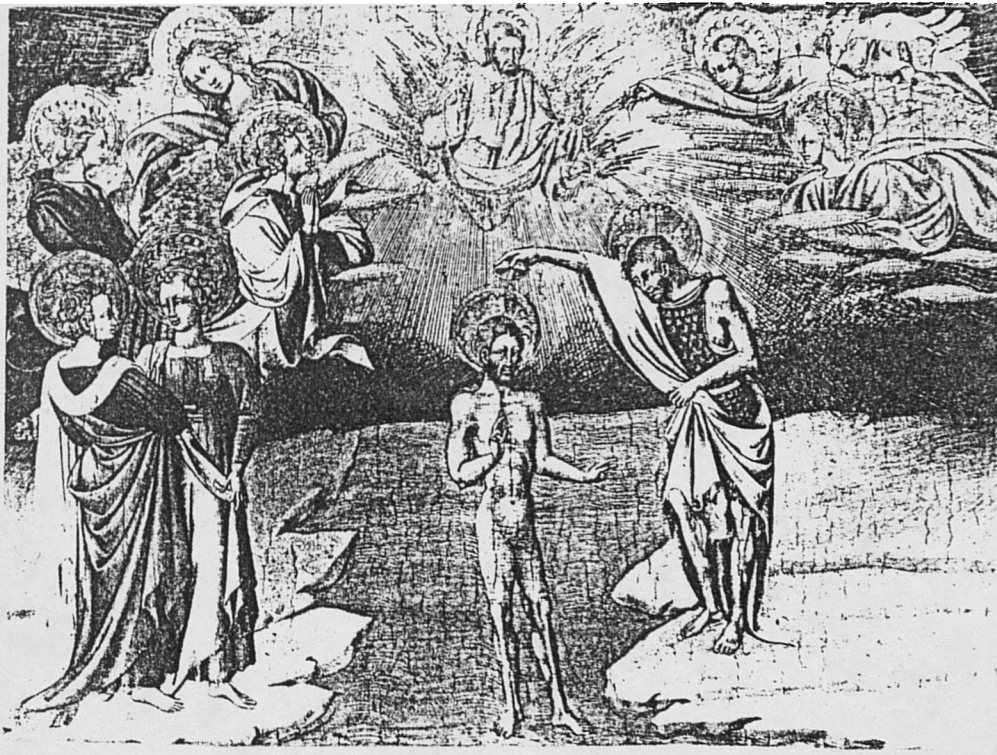


Fig. 4-12: A symbolic depiction of light.



Fig. 4-13: Robert Campin (active at Tournai 1406-1444): 'The Virgin and Child before a Firescreen', The National Gallery, London. Light became an essential painting medium rather than linear factor and simple colour.



Light was often suggested in the Middle Ages by symbolic means [21] [Fig. 4-12]. The Flemish painters **Jon van Eyck** (c.1390-1441) and his elder brother **Huber** are said to have made light break into painting more naturally. Also as we can see in 'The Virgin and Child before a Firescreen' by **Bobert Campin** (1406-1444), light became an essential painting medium rather than linear factor and simple colour [Fig. 4-13].

Light is the key to atmosphere and influences the depiction of forms, textures and colours, calling for careful observation from painters. This kind of exact observation became for northern painters the first important task. Taking 'St. Barbara, the Madonna of the Chancellor Rollin' as an example, the painter, by his fine drawing, illustrated the townscape precisely, particularly 'Old St. Paul's behind the Virgin and Child', typifying the exact and serious objective attitude of the northern artists.

Hardship in the Middle Ages and the Gothic dream of heaven had a significant influence on the northern mode of thinking. Life was mostly supported by the spirit, which was rooted deeply inside the northern minds so that at the time of the high Renaissance, the Gothic spirit was still strong enough to influence artistic thinking, and as Worringer has called: "The heavily oppressed inner life of 'Northern humanity'".[22] Maybe the key for us is to understand why and how the landscape art of the North was so different from that of the South.

21 According to Bo Jeffares (1979): in a painting by Gentle da Fabriano (1423) entitled the ADORATION OF THE MAGI the sun is literally represented by a golden disc, its light by gold under-painting. This alchemical interpretation could be compared with the kind of symbolism found in stylized ancient art, such as ancient Egypt. In the ADORATION OF THE LAMB of 1425, Van Eyck painted thin gold rays radiating down to earth in the same fashion, while at same time his powers of direct observation led him to a much more sophisticated formula. Ignoring hard outlines and crude blocks of colour, he created a tonal landscape lacking the rigidity of early works.

22 Herbert Read, *The Meaning of Art*, p.120.



The achievement of the Italian Renaissance was so great that forms of Gothic art gradually became out of date, particularly the artists in Germany and the Netherlands who became inevitably influenced by the South. As Gombrich (1984) summarized, the great achievements of the South were I: scientific perspective”, II: a knowledge of anatomy, III: the development of classical forms of building. However, in painting, there was no rule like the ‘Five Orders’ of architecture for painters to follow. Knowledge of anatomy and perspective only provide ways of defining space and organizing pictorial contents, rather than artistic philosophies. Painting should be based on something more profound, the expression of a locality or individual. For the northern artists, there was still a challenge for them to discover and understand themselves, as well as their own places and people.

In German, **Albrecht Dürer** (1471-1528), a draftsman, engraver and writer on art, was known as a diligent researcher of perspective and a patient observer of nature. His manner of sketching shows that he was searching for a high capacity of representing the outside world and totally indulging himself in his commitment. From this we can find the same quality of precision earlier revealed in the painting of van Eyck, although Dürer was a master of fantastic and visionary paintings. Taking a scientific attitude, Dürer “never tired of adding detail upon detail to build up a true little world within the compass of his copper plate.” [23] However, for Dürer, the illustration of the factual look of a natural object was not the only aim; identifiable local character was also wanted which is why the background of his famous engraving made in 1504 ‘Adam and Eve’ was set in the north of the Alps where surrounding the Garden of Eden are dark woods, rugged trees and steep mountains. Although the figures of Adam and Eve were fairly proportioned according to his profound knowledge of anatomy, the setting was local and specific.

23 Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, P.265.



Fig. 4-14: Albrecht Altdorfer (1480 - 1538): 'Christ Taking Leave of his Mother', The National Gallery, London. The Gothic arch and northern mountain and trees indicate the so-called THE NORTHERN DELIGHTS.

Again, in Germany, there were two other painters who displayed the northern delights and did not follow the fashion of the South, **Grünewald** [24] and **Albrecht Altdorfer** (c. 1480-1538). Grünewald in his painting 'Two Hermits' depicted the story of St. Anthony visiting the hermit Paul, in which the background is just like a dreadful scene from a modern harrowing film — lonely, bleak, and totally disordered wild place in which there is no sympathy with the harmony of the sunny south.

24 According to Gombrich, even his name is not quite certain, we only know he was an approximate contemporary of Albrecht Dürer.

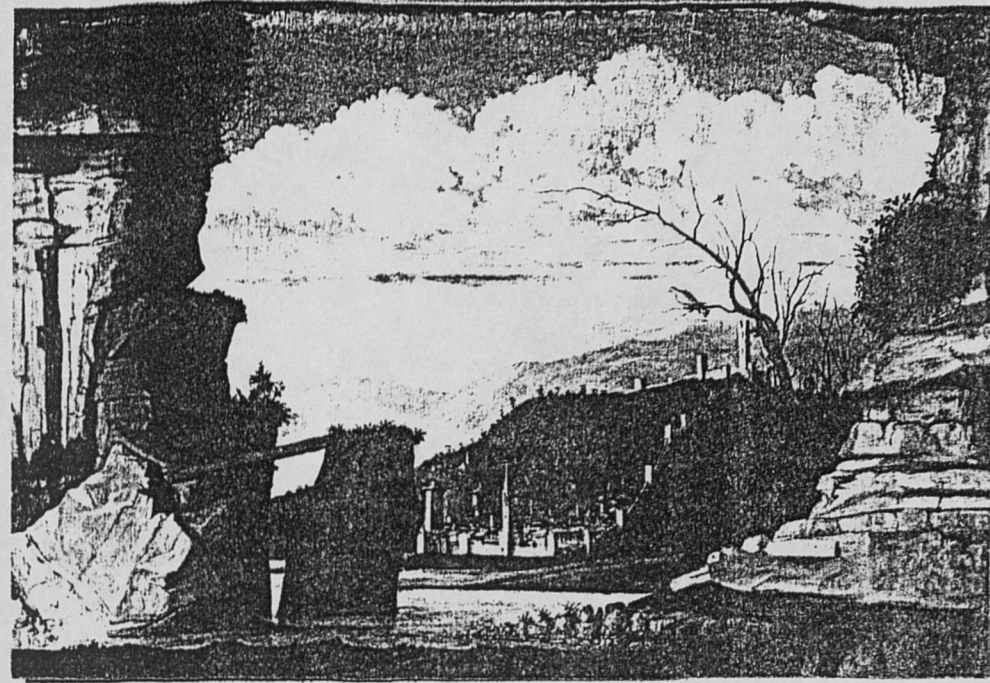


Fig. 4-15: Giovanni Bellini (c. 1435-1516): 'Saint Terome Reading in a Landscape', The National Gallery, London.

In the pictures of Altdorfer, the impact of the northern environment and psyche is also clearly demonstrated. He may be one of the first painters who made pure landscape painting without strong human content. In some of his paintings, there is no story, no events, but water, mountain, and forest, and in his 'St. George' painted in 1511, the figure of Saint almost disappears in the northern forest where the foliage is dark and extremely dense. This is the world the painter observed. Nothing here is idealized, since the classical ideal for him was far away from the real life he experienced. Thus, there was no need to copy sweet imagined images painted by the southerners; in his eyes, what was impressive was the light and the shadow, the woods and the darkness and the mist, "not orderly, decorative trees of tapestry landscape, with their gifts of fruit and blossom but menacing, organic growth, ready to smother and straggle any



intruder.” [25] Compared with Bellini’s ‘Saint Terome Reading in a Landscape’, the so-called the northern delights searched by Albrecht Altdorfer is obvious. For instance, in his painting titled ‘Christ Taking Leave of his Mother’, the Gothic arch and northern mountain and trees indicate a very different perception and feeling of the artist from northern landscape [Fig. 4-14 and Fig. 4-15].

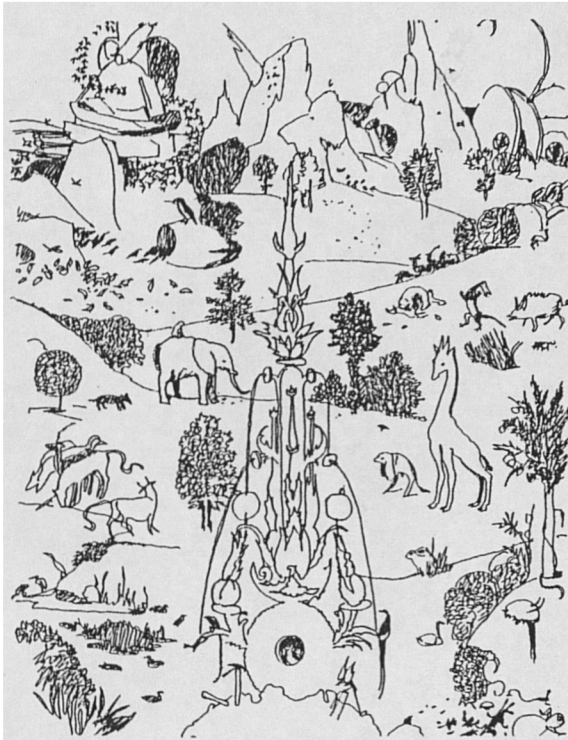


Fig. 4-16: The image of Bosch’s Paradise is full of fantastic and innocent imagination [illustration with reference to Bo Jeffares (1979), *Landscape Painting*, p.36].

In the early 16th century, another painter deeply involved in the change of landscape ideas was **Hieronymus Bosch** (1450-1516), who lived in a Dutch town called Hertogenboch. The image of his Paradise is full of fantastic and innocent imagination; his ‘Garden of Earthly

25 Kenneth Clark, *Landscape Into Art*, p.75.



Delights' is a quaint invention, rather than an impression of the real world. Imagination makes the observer absorbed in the Gothic spirit; the unconnected images even cause me to make a comparison with the work of a modern Spanish painter, **Miro!** as essentially anti-classical, almost a Gothic revival. To him it was not the beauty of the bodies of Adam and Eve but the tragedy of their expulsion from paradise and the vision of hell, the horrifying power of evil or the fantasy of paradise that were the key motives for him to image and make the picture. From this point of view, we may suggest that it was Bosch who voiced the birth of Romanticism [Fig. 4-16].

Looking at these rarely seen images in the South such as the dark woods by Altdorfer, the bleak scenes by Grünewald, the story of fantasy by Bosch, we can see that the mood of the northern painters seemed more severe than that of the southerners. The harshness of northern primitive life and the narrowness of Medievalism were still lingering. That may be the key to understand what is meant by the northern tradition. The northern response to the High Renaissance in Italy indicated a very different approach to landscape which may be seen as the 'Landscape of Fantasy' [26], but here I prefer to define it as Romantic. Actually Kenneth Clark himself had already noted this when summarizing the landscape of fantasy (1986): "So the greatest master of untamed landscape is linked with the romantic mannerists of the sixteenth century, and completes the cycle which Altdorfer and Grünewald had begun." [27]

The Romantic features in landscape painting were more clear in the late 16th century. The paintings by **Pieter Bruegel the Elder** (1520-1569)

26 This is the title of a chapter of the book *Landscape into Art* by Kenneth Clark.
27 Kenneth Clark, *Landscape Into Art*, p.107.



and **El Greco** (1541-1614), an exception among the southerners [28], are typical.



Fig. 4-17: El Greco (1541-1614): 'The Agony in Garden of Gethsemane', The National Gallery, London.

Without reference to art history El Greco's painting 'View of Toledo' might be thought of as made by a modern painter. Comparing the sky of the painting with that of Turner's, we find that there is an extreme similarity between the two masters. In El Greco's, 'View of Toledo', nature is felt rather than seen and then depicted. El Greco did not simply record anything, but used a Romantic accent to capture his expression of natural force and personal feeling, ignoring the conventions; he rather

28 El Greco who, according to Gombrich (1984), was from the Greek island of Crete, real name: Domenico Theotocopoulos. He first stayed in Venice, then settled down in Toledo, Spain.



seemed to like searching for a dramatic vision using his power of imaginations resulting in an unforgettable image [Fig. 4-17].

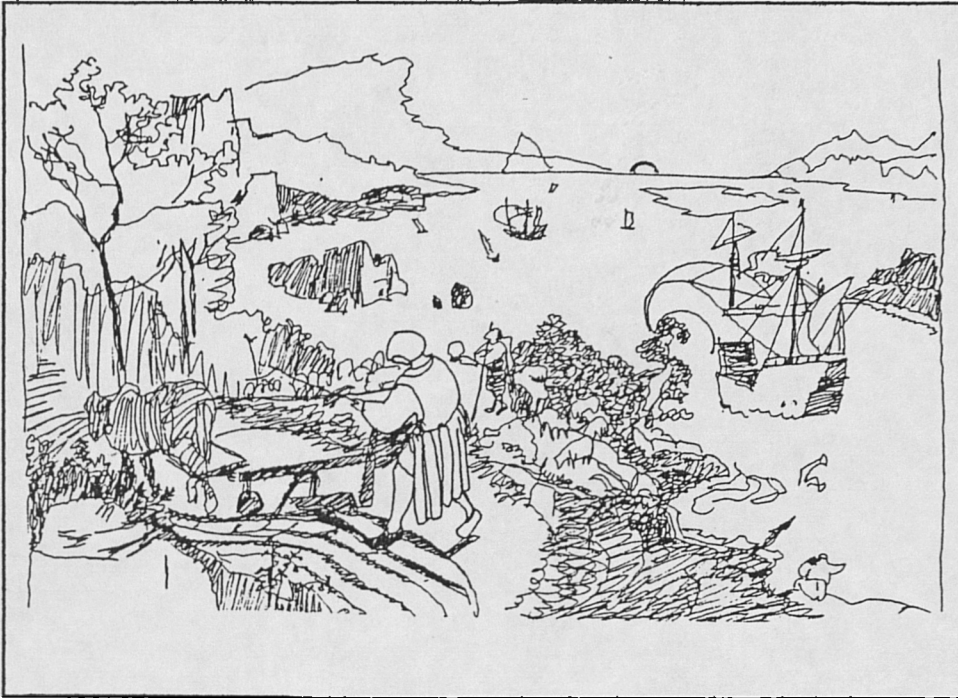


Fig. 4-18: It is very difficult indeed to find that ‘leg’ which suggested the falling Icarus [illustration with reference to Bo Jeffares (1979), *Landscape Painting*, p.39].

In contrast to the master working in Spain, the landscapes by Pieter Bruegel the elder are lyrical and gentle, but also an eccentric expression of his personal perception. On his style, Gombrich (1984) remarked that “the greatest of the Flemish sixteenth-century masters of ‘genre’ was Pieter Bruegel the elder.” [29]. In fact, the high quality of Bruegel’s landscape is achieved through a very modest manner. His ‘Hunter in the Snow’ is a

29 Pictures in which the painters deliberately cultivated a certain branch or kind of subject, particularly scenes from daily life, later became known as ‘genre pictures’ (genre being the French word for style or kind) — Gombrich: *The Story of Art*, p.295-296.



refined scene and a masterpiece conveying a profound philosophical meaning which tells us that human life depends on the environment and nature as a whole. He painted in a realistic way, the mood subtly revealed with an honest observation, intensive passion, and tenderness. Meanwhile as a romantic artist, Bruegel's great charm also lies in his imagination of fantasy. This tendency is fully shown in his extraordinary work 'The Fall of Icarus' which depicted a complicated panorama of natural scenery. We wonder whether he really wanted to tell this story since the most impressive images in the picture are the rural landscape, the brilliant colours of sky, the enameled sea, and the peasants working in the field. It is very difficult indeed to find that "leg" which suggested the falling Icarus. Composed in an unusual way and delicately designed, Bruegel amused us with his eccentric idea and poetic mood [Fig. 4-18].

Although the aesthetic style might differ from south to north, the influence of the Renaissance was generally accepted by painters, and thus the so-called Mannerism which followed the achievements of the high Renaissance spread to most parts of Europe. It was the outstanding painter, **Peter Paul Rubens** (1577-1640) who founded his luxuriant painting style by careful observation and tried to depict the richness of details and colours in exuberance. His landscape foreshadowed the so-called naturalism which was developed afterwards in Holland and became the most influential landscape style in the 17th century [30] [Fig. 4-19].

30

According to Bo Jeffares (1979), in his landscape one can find both naturalistic observation, highlighting the transient beauty of nature --- a rainbow, for example, anticipates Turner's aesthetic study --- as well as full flights of romantic escapism, such as his medieval joust before a castle wall. Rubens' landscape paintings have one thing in common, exuberance (Bo Jeffares, *Landscape Painting*, p.43).

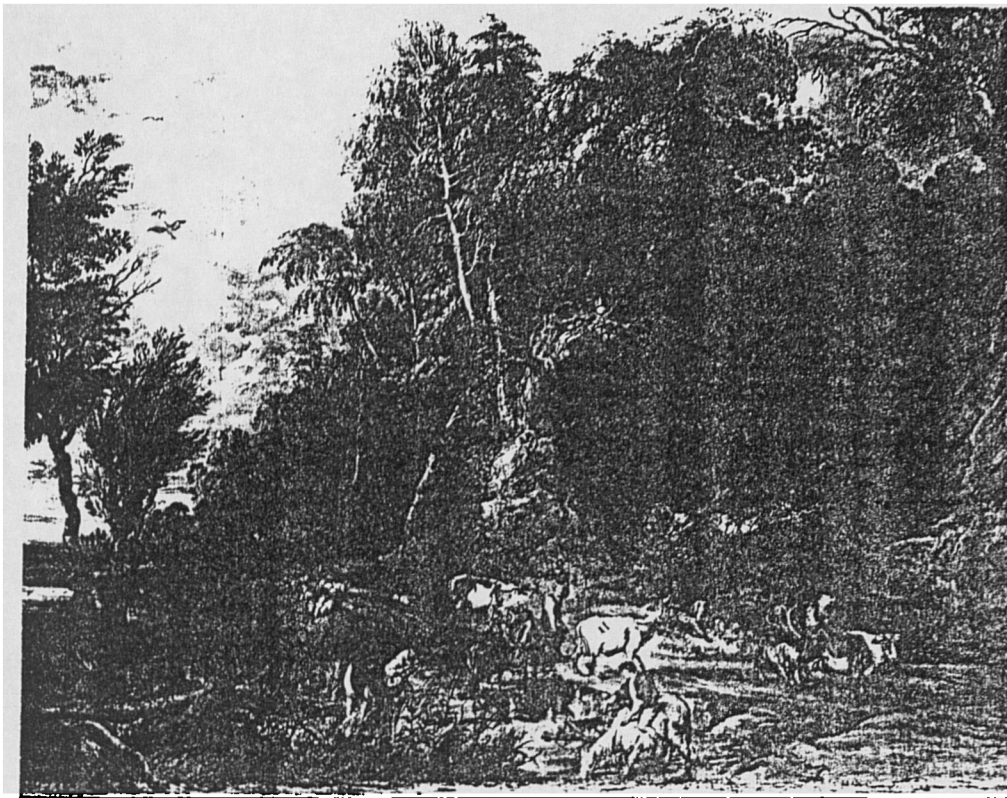


Fig. 4-19: Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640): 'Peasants with cattle by a stream in a woody Landscape (the watering place)', The National Gallery, London.

Holland in the 17th century was a relatively rich state, "with the economy based not on agriculture but on commerce. ... bankers, merchants, shippers and manufacturers constituted the upper class and under their patronage secular painting flourished as never before and as nowhere else." [31] The wealth produced patrons and painters but also a bourgeois' taste: something beautiful to be appreciated sitting on a comfortable chair. The painters here disliked the luxuriant pictures from the south; they concentrated on the study of the beauty of their own place in a domestic atmosphere. For the painters, the landscape was just like a still life, like the fresh fruit or expensive porcelains from China. There

31 High Honour & John Fleming, *A World History of Art*, Macmillan, 1984, London, p.450.



seemed no necessity to exaggerate the images of the landscapes, since the sea, the sky, the openness of the land, the gently turning mill were so poetical and rich in form and colour. As the lovers of down-to-earth life, the people were proud of their land, and thought it worth painting and buying pictures of it.

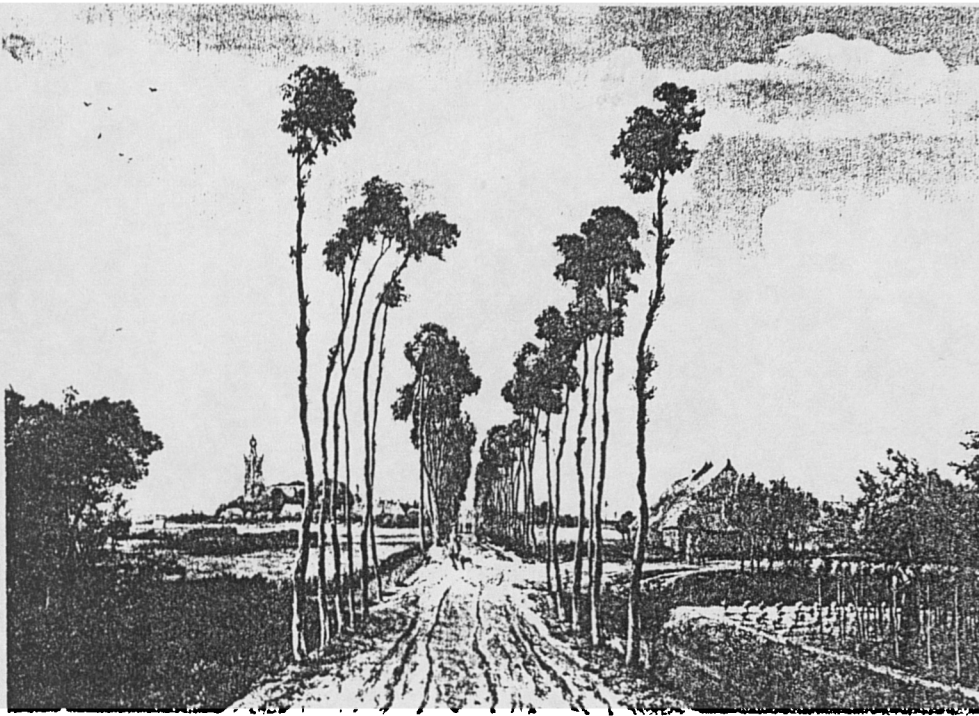


Fig. 4-20: Meindert Hobbema.(1638 -1709): 'The Avenue: The Road to Middelharnis', The National Gallery, London.

To express this passion and to satisfy the bourgeois flavour, the painting could not be too expressive or eccentric. There was no need for the painting to convey some specific meaning, to depict anecdotal and moralizing thoughts. In Holland, painting was a kind of property in which the painter painted what he saw. Thus, honest observation and practical painting skills were essential. In other words, the attitude of the people was very realistic. In the Dutch painter's eyes, the visual games played by



the Mannerists were too stereotyped. Compared with the real landscape, the mannerism images seemed pale. The Dutch painter began to move towards a new naturalism. Dreams of paradise, a ideal life now were transferred to the business of catching existing natural delights, to give people a simple sensual pleasure. By observing quietly and representing faithfully, the Dutch painters gave their own landscape aesthetic standing: searching for the “Quiet Beauty” in their native, respectable places [Fig. 4-20 and 4-21].

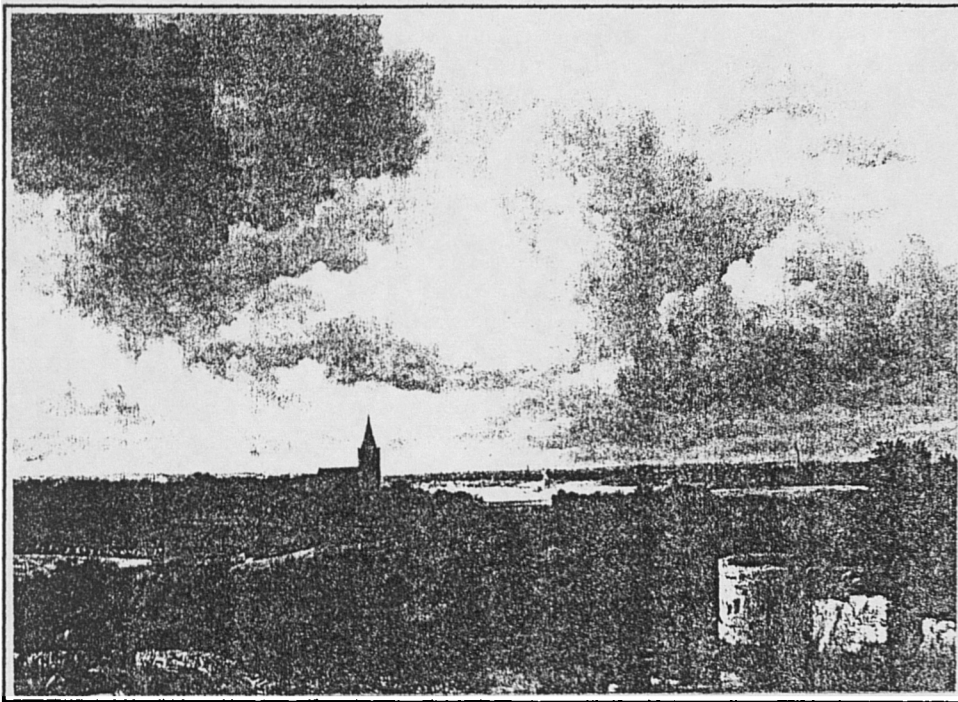


Fig. 4-21: Jacob van Ruisdael (c. 1628-1682): ‘An Extensive Landscape with Ruined Castle and Village Church’, The National Gallery, London.



Fig. 4-22: Salomon van Ruysdael (1600/3-1670): 'River Scene', The National Gallery, London.

Salomon van Ruysdael (1628-1682), was a typical representative of the Dutch painter in that time. His painting demonstrates landscapes of 17th Holland. We do not need to do a complicated analyses, what we need is just simply to see the pictures. For instance, the corn-field, the sky, the sea or the water features, those old themes painted by landscape painters again and again, in Ruysdael's canvas, are so real as be called Naturalism. There is no history, no tragedy, no sentimental mood, just what it is. He did not want to idealize anything in nature, just to paint what he saw, in which the technique, the spatial effects and the calm atmosphere explain the qualities of land and its art. It seemed that the power of an artist was not to invent something, but to truly respect natural creation and represent it. Ruysdael distinguished himself from earlier painters by his cool observation, a calm dispassionate manner. Even in a picture called 'The



Jewish Cemetery' in which a scene relates to death, there is still real scenery and peace and nothing is exaggerated or dramatized in order to move or horrify people. For him, withered trees, lonely and quiet spots are a part of nature, a part of life. Comparing this with the bleak woods by Grünewald, horrific hell by Bosch, and the dramatic sky by El Greco, Ruysdael's most horrifying picture is still a narrative one, since the bourgeois idea, the searching for the beauty of quietness occupied the artist's mind [Fig. 4-22].

The idea that painting is for comfort; art, for the pleasure of a down-to-earth life, created a fresh taste for the rising wealthy upper or middle class in Europe. This was a decisive factor in the prosperity of landscape painting in the future, when the centre was not on the Continent, but in Britain, another Romantic country.



5

TOWARDS ROMANTICISM [1]

On the English School, Herbert Read once wrote with humour in 1935: "Landscape painting is very typical of the English tradition, but no one has ever given a good definition of this tradition, and I wish that some foreigner would do it for us." [2] Unlike the Chinese School of Shan Shui painting, there are no general pictorial characteristics to describe the work of the landscape painters in England. Although paintings by Gainsborough, Constable and Turner look so English, it is very difficult to tell which qualities these paintings shared in common.

¹ As a part of European civilization, English landscape painting is a branch or variation of the Renaissance art tradition. Here, Romanticism is considered as an important trend of English landscape art and design initiated in the 18th century, since it was in 1743, when Henry Hoare laid out the Park at Stourhead, this artistic direction was brought into being in England. As an integrated developing process its aesthetic theories and major landscape practice were matured in the 18th century, and the painting of Romantics was only part of the movement which followed the main stream. Thus, Romanticism can be seen as the whole developed in the 18th century, even though Turner achieved the climax of Romanticism by his paintings at the beginning of 19th century.

² Herbert Read: *The Meaning of Art*, p.163.



5.1 THE BRITISH VARIATION

As a part of European culture, the root of English art stems from the continent, where the learning process was inevitably long and necessary. Thus if we want to understand the ideas of English landscape painting and its picturesque tendency, we must know the influences of the classical landscape ideal, particularly that of Claude and Poussin.

In the 18th century, the landscapes of Claude were well received and the imitators of the “Italy master” were everywhere. Since then the art atmosphere had become dull. Surprisingly, it was in the middle of the ‘dull period’, that the English artists completed the learning process, and soon changed their position from a learner to a contributor. For the first time in European art history the English played a leading role.

In England, the Gothic tradition was the basic cultural background, but when the Renaissance waves lashed the seashore, they sent up “sprays” which symbolized the change in English artistic tendencies.

English art was different from the architecture which was following the Italian style, since painting was influenced by the northern artists, particularly those from Holland. The realistic attitude, the need for comfort, the desire to search for true a likeness narrowed the function of landscape painting. Some recognized foreign painters such as **Holbein** (1497-1543), **Rubens** (1577-1640), **van Dyck** came to England to meet these needs. According to Charles Hemming (1989), it was **Wenceslaus Hollar** (1607-1677) who moved to England and founded the English School of watercolour landscape. Another Dutch oil painter **Jan Sibriechts** (1627-c. 1700/05), specialized in painting ‘prospect’ pictures, and started a style of ‘estate portrait’ in England to meet the needs of the landed upper class. At this time the English landscape painter seldom



painted what we now think of as the typical English landscape, but simply the portrait of an estate.

Although the Dutch word 'landscape' (landschap) was used in England as early as 1598 (Geoffrey Grigson, 1975), landscape painting in England in the 17th century was almost all done by foreigners. It was about the beginning of the 18th century that the fashion began to change. The aristocracy purchased landscape paintings of the classical masters direct from Italy, and the kind of landscape which fascinated those English buyers were the work of Claude and Poussin. Here we must emphasize that they not only imported the paintings, but also the landscape ideal demonstrated by those pictures. Meanwhile, the imitations of those paintings by local artists were promoted by the buyers from the middle class, who might not afford the originals of the classical masters. Therefore, a high admiration of the classical art speeded up the learning process of English artists. At the same time, it made the local artist think about how to paint "my own place".

5.2 PAINTING MY OWN PLACE

It was **William Hogarth** (1697-1764), who was not a painter of landscape, recognized the self-consciousness of English art. He wrote a book entitled 'The Analysis of Beauty' suggesting that "an undulating line will always be more beautiful than an angular one", and he "was sure that he had found a law which governed beauty." [3] It was first time that an English artist spoke of his own understanding of art and told people how to appreciate painting.

³ Gombrich: *The Story of Art*, p.366.



Curiously, it was an amateur landscape designer **Henry Hoare**, who in 1743 and laid out the garden at Stourhead in Wiltshire, showing a indigenous English sense of landscape art. [4] while the response of the landscape painters to the significant change was relatively slow. The career of **Richard Wilson** (1713-1782) is a typical example.

Wilson, a Welsh painter, went to Italy and remained there for six years. He was nominated as one of the foundation members of the Royal Academy. But in 1776 living on painting was so difficult that he eventually received a small income as a librarian in the Academy. According to John Rothenstein, even Reynolds neglected him. He died under his relative's roof with his Italian landscape dream and classical beliefs, although he is thought of by historians as the first great landscape painter in England. The reason for his failure is not clear but, in terms of painting, it might be that he was too classical, too "Claude", and that the classical expression of English landscape was not fully appreciated in that time. Compared with him, **Thomas Gainsborough** (1727-1788) was lucky.

Unlike Wilson, Gainsborough fell in love with his native landscape and was not interested in following the Italian masters; for him, to catch the English mood and touch the landscape at home with intimacy, seemed more important. Meanwhile, the concept of local scenery, the images of English land demonstrated in his paintings, helped him to establish a communication with the landed upper class who felt difficulty in totally accepting the abstract artistic ideal brought back by Wilson. To this extent, Gainsborough was more sympathetic to the landscape idea of Dutch painters mentioned in a previous chapter.

⁴ We shall discuss this in later chapters.



“Both Reynolds [5] and Gainsborough were rather unhappy to be smothered with commissions for portraits when they wanted to paint other things.” [6] However, Gainsborough was different from Reynolds; he had no ambition of making his name by painting important historical subjects as Reynolds did, but chose to depict the quietness and gentleness of his homeland. “He was far more of a colourist and a subtler observer than Hogarth.” [7] Unfortunately he did not fully develop his landscape painting. After moving to Bath in 1759, his intimate observation of landscape almost stopped, becoming merely a decorative background of his portraits which were unreal, but graceful and comfortable like the designs of theatre. This change made him fit in with the society he had to deal with, giving him a better living than other poor artists. “His limitations are obvious. He had no any ambition to master the general art tendency and very little imagination. He worked directly from the object to the canvas, and was only moved by this immediate contact.” [8] He could not invent, but painted with a passion. However, Gainsborough had a tender hand and good intuition, as Ruskin said: “Gainsborough’s hand is as light as the sweep of a colour, as swift as the flash of a sunbeam.” [9] He left a lot of beautiful pictures, particularly his early works which are reflections of real English life in that time; the quality of locality and the passion of loving his own land makes the pictures alive. Herbert Read

5 Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792) first principal of the Royal Academy of Fine Art. Unlike Hogarth he visited Italy. He was learned as a representative of the true Renaissance style. In his 'Discourse' promoted "the grand and impressive was worth of the name of Great art". He was not interested in landscape but in historical painting, only in the background of his portraits there is some landscape feature.

6 Gombrich: *The Story of Art*, p.371

7 Charles Hemming: *British Landscape Painting*, Victor Gollancz Ltd. 1989. London, p.38

8 Herbert Read (1968): *The Meaning of Art*, Faber & Faber Limited, London, p. 166.

9 Herbert Read: *The Meaning of Art*, P.166.



(1968) praised his pictures: “We can never tire of such art because it demands nothing but enjoyment; it cannot cloy because it is concise and passionate, not diffusely sentimental.” [10]



Fig. 5-1: Thomas Gainsborough: Sunset — Carthorses drinking at a Stream. The Tate Gallery, London. Gainsborough is the man who stepped on the first stage to search for the crucial quality of landscape art: a passion for Locality.

Gainsborough was not a figure to bring about great change, but he did try to paint the individuality of English landscape; he is the man who stepped on the first stage to search for the crucial quality of landscape art: a passion for Locality. That is why Constable said with feeling: “On

10 Herbert Read: *The Meaning of Art*, p.167.



looking at them, we find tears in our eyes and know not what brings them.” [11] [Fig. 5-1]

Another important figure who promoted this local sense in the history of English landscape art was **John Crome** (1728-1821). He was the son of a poor weaver, but he established himself as a painter and founded the Norwich School in 1803. Although he visited France in 1814, he did not follow the continental fashion. As a local painter, he devoted himself fully to the study of landscape at home.

The transitional process from receiving influences to establishing the sense of locality by now was almost complete. This was a very important base for further development and precisely coincided with the increase of the wealth and change of social orientation in England. It was **John Constable** (1776-1837) who now spoke out with a resounding voice.

5.3 CONSTABLE & SENSE OF LOCALITY

The efforts of Wilson, Gainsborough, and Crome did not change the situation of English landscape painting fundamentally, but one thing is clear: that however perfect the classical landscape is, however real and comfortable the Dutch paintings are, they are not of England, although the ideas and the technique were worth admiring and learning from. The sense of the locality versus the continental style was waiting to be further developed in England.

Although these earlier painters were not as successful, they paved the way and cultivated the taste of patrons for the painters coming later. With classical discipline and following the realistic road of Dutch painters,

11 John Rothenstein: *An Introduction to English Painting*, p.135.



John Constable stepped in. He was a painter who thought: “There has never been an age, however rude or uncultivated, in which the love of landscape has not in some way been manifested.” He learned many from the continental masters and local painters and eventually developed his own landscape style.

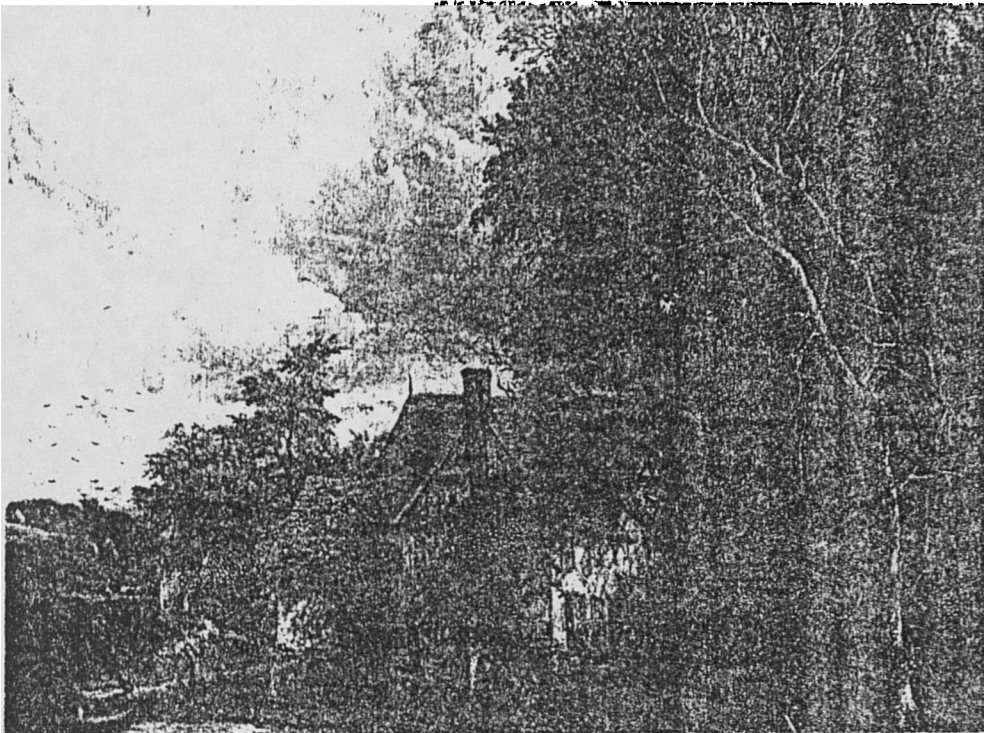


Fig. 5-2: Jhon Constable: The Valley Farm (The Tate Gallery, London) — Constable’s paintings again encourages us to use the term **Placescape** to define the general quality of landscape painting.

Constable, the second son of a miller and merchant in the Suffolk village of East Bergholt, chose his profession as a landscape painter which is “full of hand-to-mouth failures”, but “art affairs, life affairs, could worry him, clouds, light, sparkle, tree, painting, enthralled him once more and



sustained him ...” [12] In his early years, he struggled to keep painting. All his life, even as a Royal Academician, he was still a modest painter who indulged in the English land: the meadow, the skies, slopes, the river and so on. Human activities were never abandoned in his painting, preferring to depict real life, cultivated land to the wildness where people felt distanced. However, the landscape in Constable’s mind, is not the homogeneous picture of the “property portrait” or “status landscape”, but the rustic rural life or the humble living of ordinary farmers. Constable said that he had never seen an ugly thing in his life; he liked nature and praised ordinary things. Learning from Claude’s landscapes, and the works of Dutch painters provided him the painting technique and the methods of observation to carry on his own exploration. But the close study of his ‘own place’ was the most important source of Constable’s art. The atmosphere in Constable’s pictures is generally peaceful and pastoral as in the paintings of Claude and that of Dutch painters. The difference is that he developed his own technique to draw and paint, the English weather, sky, earth and man as he saw it. The sense of locality distinguished his pictures from other masters.

The contribution of Constable to the English School is quite different from that of Turner. [13] “Where Turner painted the Fighting Temeraire, Constable painted a hay cart crossing a stream. Where Turner was operatic, Constable was domestic.” [14] However, the pictorial effects by Constable are not as dramatic as that of Turner, where the depth of native feeling and the affection of his own land is revealed in a more

12 Geoffrey Grigson: *Britain Observed*, Phaidon Press Ltd. 1975, London, p. 92

13 Although Turner was older than Constable, it was Constable who continued the Classical discipline and received the same influences from Dutch painting as Gainsborough did, so we think his landscape ideas are a continuation of those of the beginning of the eighteenth century. The career of Turner was an exception in the history of English landscape, which is thought of as the climax of the Romanticism of English landscape.

14 Bo Jeffares: *Landscape Painting*, .P.54.



humble but solid manner. Constable's work provides a typical example of English art which is far away from the classical ideal and is down-to-earth, close to local people and their daily life. In terms of aesthetics, he founded an individual way to see and paint; he caught the real English mood of living; he understood that beauty lies in the continuing discovery process, rather than in copying the ready-made idealized perfection. It is Constable who fundamentally changed the English attitude towards landscape painting. His landscapes are not only for the estate owners or the pursuers of cultural symbol and status, but mostly for his belief and his nation. Therefore a tiny corner, a simple farmhouse, a piece of woodland, a small bridge, folk passing by, all sorts of unpretentious living things became the most important theme in his rustic painting; and his great amount of preparatory works, the sketches by pencil or oil, in particular, stressed his sense of place and his artistic individuality and technique. From these pictures one can understand what England was like, i.e. the places and the people, and the kind of character which distinguishes Constable from continental painters. His painting again encourages us to use the term **Placescape** to define the general quality of landscape painting.

Paintings by Constable are so natural that we can even see the action, the working process while he was painting. He is a great master who depicted intensive landscape beauty with a gentle, plain, and rustic manner to achieve a high aesthetic standard of landscape art. The more ordinary the scenery is, the more powerful the affection it reveals. We must agree with Pissarro: "Happy are those who see beauty in modest spots where others see nothing. Everything is beautiful, the whole secret lies in knowing how to interpret." [15]

Constable was so realistic that we hesitate to stress his relation with the Romantics. But he did promote the sense of place. The locality in his paintings is far away from the pretentious idealized landscape; he is the

15

Geoffrey Grigson: *Britain Observed*, Phaidon Press limited, 1975, London. p.9.



painter of pictures in which “comforting, health-growing nature is represented...” [16] His landscape career was full of diversity, the real place he lived, into which he injected tremendous passion; he is a painter of passion and feeling. In this sense, he is definitely not classical but romantically oriented. When compared with the classical doctrine such as “noble simplicity” suggested by Winckelmann, or the bourgeois taste revealed in the landscape paintings of Holland, his art was far away from the formula and a part of the English Romanticism [Fig. 5-2 and Fig. 5-3]. [17]

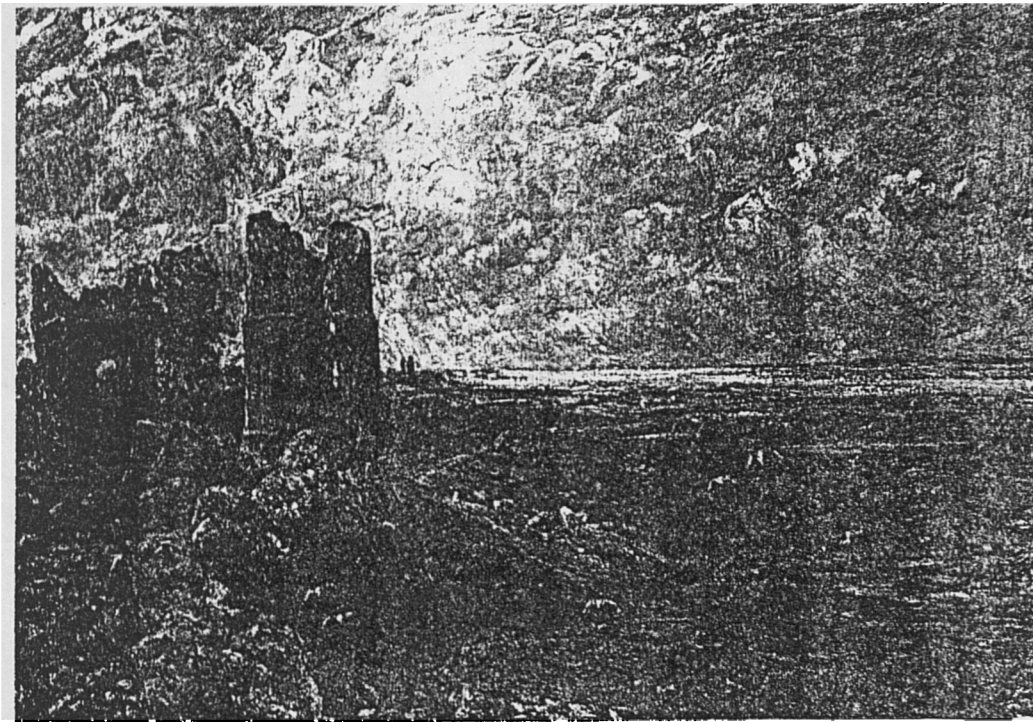


Fig. 5-3: John Constable: Sketch for ‘Hadleigh Castle’ (The Tate Gallery, London) — Constable’s art was far away from the classical formula and a part of the English Romanticism with strong ‘English accent’.

16 Kenneth Clark: *The Romantic Rebellion*, Sotheby, London, 1986. p. 265.

17 Also see chapter 7.



5.4 THE ROMANTIC: TURNER

It is difficult to describe **J. M. William Turner** (1775-1851). He is fantastic and unique in the history of English landscape art. According to Ruskin: “Turner is an exception to all rules, and can be judged by no standard of art. In a wildly magnificent enthusiasm, he rushes through the aethereal dominions of the world of his mind — a place inhabited by the Spirits of things; he has filled his mind with materials drawn from the close study of nature (no artist has studied nature more intently) — and then changes and combines, giving effects without absolute causes, or, to speak more accurately, seizing the soul and essence of beauty, without regarding the means by which it was effected.” [18] As to the personal qualities of Turner, Ruskin described his main characteristics as: “Uprightness, Generosity, Tenderness of heart (extreme), Obstinacy extreme), Irritability, Infidelity.” [19]

Turner was the son of a London barber who lacked a formal education, which according to Herbert Read (1968) may have sharpened his visual sensibility. Like other painting masters, he established himself as a painter by both his genius and hard work. However, according to Kenneth Clark (1986), he “was a great reader of poetry, in particular that of James Thomson, Akenside and Byron.” [20] He was clearly aware of how poetical effect could influence the quality of a landscape painting. He became an associate of the Royal Academy in 1789, and a full member in 1802 and studied in Reynolds’ studio for a short time. We know little about his personal life. Herbert Read (1968) mentioned that “he had an

18 Herbert Read: *The Meaning of Art*, p.174.

19 Herbert Read: *The Meaning of Art*, p.176.

20 Kenneth Clark: *The Romantic Rebellion*, p.223.



early disappointment in love, and never married. He did not mix in polite society; he preferred the company of sailors and what the Victorians called “drabs” — the female patrons of the London gin-shops. A certain secretiveness and misanthropy which made him anti-social and eccentric.” Although such details are very limited, it is still helpful for us to understand this eccentric but outstanding English colourist and Romantic.

Some say Turner was both ambitious and miserly. We wonder how a boy from so humble a background and who experienced an unhappy life became an ambitious painter? One of the answers may lie in his discovery and understanding of the natural power of his sharp eyes and unusual mind. He lived in Britain where the weather changes dramatically. Dynamic natural forces were sharply perceived by Turner in landscapes depicting the Yorkshire Dales, the Lake District, North Wales, the bleak moors, the cool, grey waves of the seashore, the violent gales sweeping over the hills, the lonely ruins, the dark woods which do not suggest “ideal”, harmony, peace, or so-called noble quietness like the images from classical masterpieces, but instead something more powerful and mystical. Leaving the aesthetic judgment aside, the most impressive thing is the power of natural genius. When experienced, a painter (or anyone who can draw) desperately has a desire to record his own true feelings: excitement and fear. Turner successfully experienced and expressed these feelings in his unique pictures. Those who are aware of what he has done as an unique, impressive depiction of natural forces, might think that there is something missing in the landscape of the old masters and to this extent, they are surpassed by Turner. What is more, Turner truly put his emotions in the pictures, and only he knows how much pain, fear, and dreadful moments he experienced when making these landscape images.

Turner’s career shows us that Romanticism is not a conceptual art, but demands a feeling crystallized from experiences of real life and nature.



Turner has also been called “the father of impressionism” because of his realistic attitude of observation. However, on Turner’s canvases, the facts provided by observation were transformed by his romantic imagination. Ruskin once described the process in these words: “Such is always the mode in which the highest imaginative faculty seizes its materials. It never stops at crusts or ashes, or outward images of any kind; it ploughs them all aside, and plunges into the very central fiery heart; nothing else will content its spirituality.” [21]

It is true that Turner’s work is the greatest revelation ever made of the power and majesty of nature. But to express the sublimity of divine power is only one part of his range. On the another hand, the tenderness, the intimacy of early summer, the quiet harbour, the lonely ruins on the open field, can also evoke a lyrical or solemn emotion, thus, some of his pictures can be called essentially ‘poetic’, but romantically treated. [22]

Because of Turner, for the first time, in English landscape painting the emotion as a important factor is fully revealed. Even today, an audience can still have a strong emotional response to Turner’s works. Turner’s landscape is an extreme, yet there is no distortion. A landscape may be of quietness, but that of Turner must be very quiet, and can evoke an association of death, such as ‘Peace, Burial at Sea’; a landscape can be a depiction of movement, but that of Turner may be so dynamic as to be overwhelming, such as ‘The Shipwreck’. The way he represented landscape was intensive and extensive; he voiced what he understood rather than simply suggested what he saw. All Turner’s work is about a sheer presence of the quality of nature not merely its appearances; all his

21 Herbert Read: *The Meaning of Art*, p.177

22 There is no boundaries between clouds and mountains or water; the sea touches the sky; the wind is sweeping over the land and throwing the boats off its balance; he men, the trees is being in a turbulence by the atmospheric changing... All the 'voice' from Turner's painting tells us haw he felt the nature romantically.



expression links to his experiences both in personal life and a close observation of nature. For him, observation goes with emotion; the emotions are apparent in all the scenes he composed.

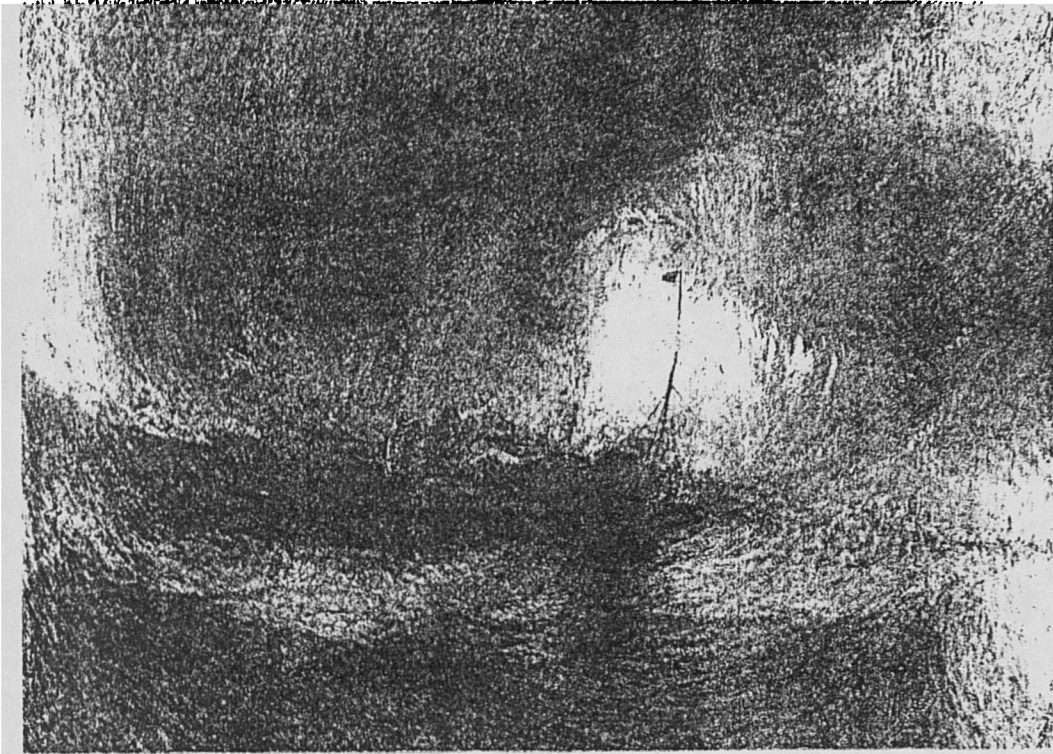


Fig. 5-4: J. M. W. Turner: Snow Storm — Steam-Boat off a Harbour Mouth (The Tate Gallery, London). For the first time in English landscape painting, the emotion as an important factor is fully revealed.

Beauty for him is different from that appreciated by classical masters and the Dutch. For Turner, it lies in the process of experiencing exciting and dynamic natural movements, evoking strong emotions and diversified images, which may look ‘ugly’, but more close to the purpose of art, more forceful, evoking an aesthetic experience. In short, the quality of Turner’s landscapes is a pictorial extreme of both experience and emotion. The qualities are infinite, an association of the open-ended exploration of natural beauty are forever attractive to the beholder.



Though a Romantic, Turner, alongside such an objective aesthetic approach to beauty, deeply rooted his seeds of landscape imagination in the ground of the objective experiential world. The outcome of both experiencing and feeling things is more enriching than that of only an impersonal observation or from emotion felt separately.

The imagination of the artist has the form of an individual expedition. It cannot come from a ready-made doctrinaire theory. The untiring pursuit of the 'accent' on expression is crucial to a true landscape artist. Turner once said: "If theory dares to stipulate for aerial hues, peculiar colours or tone of colour, she would here step to self-destructing... (The) imagination of the artist dwells enthroned in his own recess (and) must be incomprehensible as from darkness; and even words fall short of illustration, or become illusory of pictorial appreciations." [23] Blake did understand this [24], Gainsborough and Constable tried this, but only Turner achieved the climax.

In the West, Turner is unique. However, his approach to landscape is not as strange to someone of the East. As Bo Jeffares noted: "Just as Chinese Zen painters concentrated on evoking the eternal qualities of 'mountain' and 'water' (Shan Shui), so Turner, with an inclusive like that in Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind', dealt in 'essences'." [Fig. 5-4 and Fig. 5-5] [25]

23 Turner's fifth Royal Academy Lecture, 1818. Quoted from Geoffrey Grigson: *Britain Observed*, p.187.

24 According to Herbert Read (1935), William Blake (1757-1827) was the prophet of Gothic and Romantic revivals. He said: "Grecian is Mathematical Form: Gothic is Living Form. Mathematical form is Eternal Existence;" and these words reveal his profound understanding of the essentials of Gothic art. Gothic art is linear art, and it is living. "In Gothic art at its zenith we find a great depth of feeling and imaginative creativeness given form and definition by absolute adherence to the precision of linear outline. The greatest force flows through the most definite channels; ... And Blake's profoundest realization: 'Nature has no Outline', but Imagination has." Herbert Read: *The Meaning of Art*, p.169.

25 Bo Jeffares: *Landscape Painting*, Phaidon Press Limited, Oxford, 1979, p.54

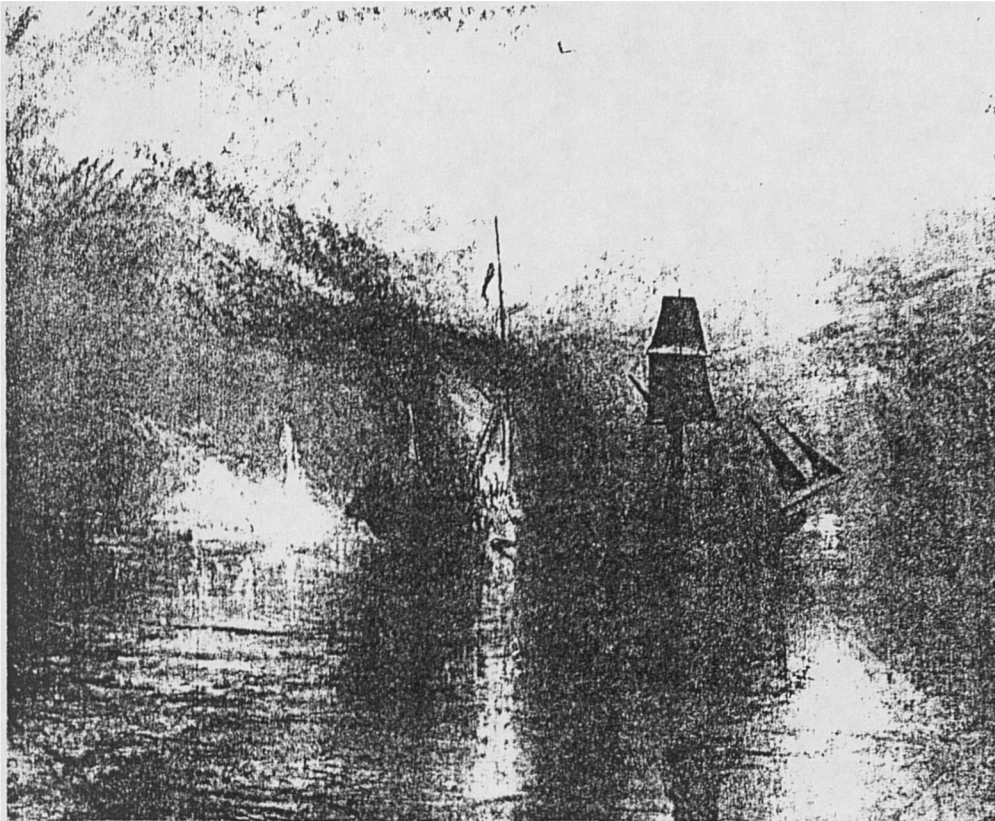


Fig. 5-5: J. M. W. Turner: Peace: Burial at Sea (The Tate Gallery, London). “Just as Chinese Zen painters concentrated on evoking the eternal qualities of ‘mountain’ and ‘water’ (Shan Shui), so Turner, with an inclusive like that in Shelley’s ‘Ode to the West Wind’, dealt in ‘essences’.”

5.5 THE ENGLISHNESS

It is difficult to define exactly the tradition of English landscape painting. If we say the English like a comfortable and realistic picture, the answer is who doesn't not in Europe? What is more, when comparing English landscape painting with that of Holland, English painting does not seem comfortable and realistic enough. We may think that English



landscape seems very expressive, but compared with that of the Chinese and Germans, the English landscape painting is not so very typical [26].

The characteristics of English landscape painting can be summarized in one word: Englishness. Here, the word includes the following three aspects:

I. The artistic tendency of the English School of landscape painting is anti-classical, since the emphasis was placed on landscape experienced rather than idealized, in this sense, Gainsborough, Constable and Turner are the typical.

II. The natural beauty sought by English painters is not a framed still image, but a down-to-earth dynamic representing their islands: the speed of wind, the temperatures of the four seasons, the clouds in the sky, life between the hills and the dales. The most important is the mood of the people differs from most of those on the continent, particularly, southern Europe. Thus, the experience of environment and refinement in the beauty of nature is registered through a clear sense of locality resulting in specific landscape images and imaginative pictures.

III. The English landscape painter expressed the beauty of his homeland, and the people were proud of their discovery. With an increase of national pride and a passion for the homeland, a British spirit was growing, the essence of the place, the gentleness of the green land, and even the eccentricity of artists may be praised enthusiastically. In short, Englishness is a reflection of the mood of Northern Empiricists.

This may be not a complete answer to the question raised by Herbert Read half century ago. There is still long way to go to achieve a satisfactory conclusion. It may possible to complete the answer by a comparison between the English School and that of the Chinese landscape painting — Shan Shui.

26 See chapter 6 and chapter 7.



6

ON SHAN SHUI

The subject of the aesthetics of Chinese landscape painting covers a wide range of knowledge of Chinese culture. Our discussion here is to focus on the following main issues:

- I. THE CONCEPT OF CHINESE LANDSCAPE ART
- II. THE PROCESS OF REVELATION
- III. THE CLASSICAL AESTHETIC IDEAS
- IV. BASIC AESTHETIC CATEGORIES OF SHAN SHUI ART
- V. QUALITY OF SHAN SHUI PAINTING

6.1

THE CONCEPT OF CHINESE LANDSCAPE PAINTING

In a Chinese classical dictionary there is no such term as 'landscape painting' in the Western sense. The Chinese call landscape painting **Shan Shui** [Fig. 6-1].

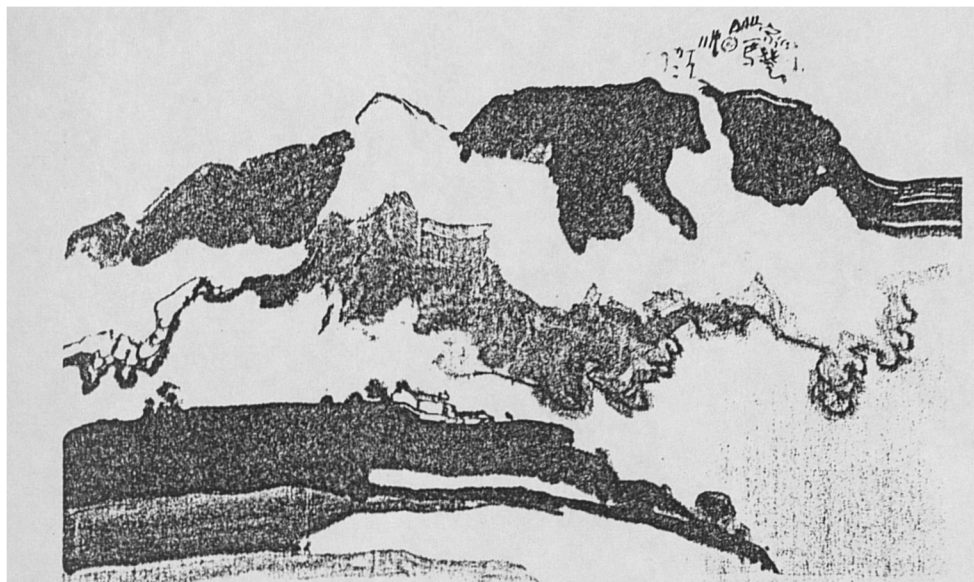


Fig. 6-1: SHAN SHUI PAINTING by Jiahua Wu, 1992

Shan means mountain (all kinds of different land forms); Shui means water (lake, river, sea, ocean, etc.). Thus, translated into English, Chinese landscape painting means 'Mountain and Water'. Shan is hard, still, sublime, vertically developed, close to the heaven; Shui is soft, moveable, sub-durable, horizontally developed, close to the earth. Shui embraces Shan, Shan surrounds Shui. All creatures live on the earth in between Shan and Shui, created and formed by each other. There is space, time, change; there are also feelings, emotions and stories, in which the beauty of nature and life lies. To make a landscape painting is to take a "ferry" going between Shan and Shui; by doing so, human feelings, emotions connect with the essence of nature. For more than 1,500 years, through understanding, Chinese landscape painting has developed as the most glorious part of Chinese culture. It is different from landscape painting in the West in that Shan Shui art has persisted as the most important position in Chinese fine art since the Tang Dynasty (618-907) and has fundamentally influenced landscape art all over the East



(particularly, that of Japan, Korea and many parts of South-East Asia). The ideas of Shan Shui art founded a philosophical basis for Chinese landscape design which also influenced general ideas of Eastern Landscape design.

Painting in ancient China is classified into three classes: the first is landscape painting, Shan Shui; the second is 'flower and birds' which is similar to the 'still life' in the West; the third is painting about humans, such as portraits or paintings of social events, which is classified as the lowest class. It seems a little ridiculous and very different from the art concept of Western tradition. However, the Chinese have accepted this naturally with no hesitation. Why is this so, and why should Shan Shui be ranked beyond other kinds of art? The reasons are many and different. From an aesthetic point of view, the key is that with time, Shan Shui painting has become a powerful artistic medium to reveal the capacity of practising visual art of the Chinese. The Chinese world outlook and life attitude operates behind or is symbolized by the images of all kinds of painted landscape.

For instance, Confucius, the founder of Confucianism once said: "The wise man prefers water; the benevolent prefers mountain; the former is active, the latter is quiet; He who knows is happy; he who is benevolent will have a long life." [1] Here, life and landscape is linked. Laozi once noted: the Way (Tao) is "Naturally So", a remarkable philosophical conclusion of understanding of the world that of course has had a tremendous influence on Chinese art concepts. Zen, the assimilated religious idea of Buddhism also promoted a natural and poetic manner among Chinese intellectuals and painters.

¹ Author's translation from *Notes of the Four Books* By Zhuxi (1130-1200, philosopher of Southern Song Dynasty), p. 128, Reprinted by the Yo Lu Book Publisher, Chansha, 1988.



That is why the **task** of Chinese landscape painting is described as: “By a simple brush to draw the Chi (The Spirit or essence) of the whole body of the cosmos” or “To establish the spirit in an ocean of ink.” This understanding linking art with philosophy, has defined the Chinese way of seeing and painting in quite a romantic manner.

6.2

THE PROCESS OF REVELATION THE NORTHERN SCHOOL VERSUS THE SOUTHERN SCHOOL

Here we have no intention of re-writing the history of Chinese art. While Shan Shui painting is the main body of Chinese fine art, a brief review of its evolution will help to understand the Chinese way of appreciating and painting landscape.

In terms of developing a process, Chinese landscape painting, like that of the West, came relatively late in history compared with other kinds of art, and was also developed from a living environment, or a background recording human events, to an independent kind of art.

There was no clear difference between painting and crafts until the Northern and Southern Dynasty (420- 550 AD). Only after a large quantity of silk and particularly the paper what is called ‘rice paper’ in the West came to be used widely, could Chinese artists express themselves much freely and easier than before.

Chinese landscape painting is said to have begun in the period of Jing (4th - 5th century, AD.). In the background of the paintings by **Gu Kaizhi** (died 406/7) there were profound composed landscape images. A painter called **Zhan Zichen** was noted by most of Chinese historians as the first landscape painter in China. He painted ‘The Picture of Touring in Spring’ [Fig. 6-2] which followed the proportions we mentioned in chapter



3: “A Zhan, for the mountain; a Chi, the tree; a Cun, the horse; a fen, the man” in depicting landscape.



Fig. 6-2: Zhan Zichen: ‘The Picture of Touring in Spring’.

It was in the **Tang Dynasty** (581-907 AD), the most glorious era of Chinese civilization, that all kinds of art were fully developed. Since then, Chinese Landscape painting had become one of the most important branches of Chinese fine art, and has influenced the development of art in the whole Far East. However, Shan Shui in the Tang Dynasty was still at a developing stage; a great leap forward to a fully matured Shan Shui art came in the **Song Dynasty**.

In the **Song Dynasty** (including the Northern Song 960-1127 and Southern Song, 1127-1279), the technique and theory of Chinese classical landscape painting matured and became more and more important, and promoted by the Royal Academy as well as many painting masters.

However, a real change, a great leap towards a high realm of landscape art from depicting landscape observed to expressing what been felt was in the **Yuan Dynasty** (1271-1368). The so-called Xeyi or Scholar painting and its basic aesthetic stances was actually founded by Yuan masters and since then landscape painting has become a dominating kind



of art in Chinese art history. Although this Dynasty was very short and the ruler was from a lower civilization, the mood of Chinese intellectuals was very depressed. In terms of aesthetics, we value the contribution of Yuan Masters highly.

After Yuan came the **Ming Dynasty** (1368-1644) when a commercial economy was initiated. Unfortunately it could not fully develop since the feudal system was rooted very deep in this old kingdom. Yet there was a so-called Chinese Renaissance during this period. Although the contribution of the Ming masters was limited, the revival of the Chinese cultural tradition and a summary of classical art theory was undertaken, which established a continuation of the art tradition after a long time of disturbed social life. This was necessary, and in fact the art theory summarized by Ming masters has been very influential in the study of Chinese art history.

The last climax of Chinese landscape painting was in the **Qing Dynasty** (1644-1911). Referring to the theory of Ming masters and based on the techniques developed by the Yuan and Ming masters, Chinese landscape painters achieved another highest level. Again a powerful feeling of emotion was injected into this art. The highly developed technique of using the Chinese painting media, i.e. ink and brush, was further refined and developed by Qing masters, which had a tremendous influence on modern Chinese fine art.

A study in the changes of painting style is a very complicated task. The idea of '**the Northern School versus the Southern School**' raised by a scholar and painter call **Dong Qichan** (1555-1636) in the late Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), which, to some extent, reflected the changes of Chinese art style is a specific issue that allows us to analyze the changes of painting styles dynamically. It is also a clue for us to approach the process in understanding the revelations of Chinese landscape painting, although it is still a debated issue in Chinese art history.



According to Dong Qichan, in terms of painting styles, all Chinese landscape paintings can be classified as of either the Northern or the Southern School. He considered that Wangwei initiated the Southern School and emphasized an intense expression of feelings and painting ideas; Li Sixun initiated that of the Northern School which pays much attention to representing realistic images. However, Dong Qichan preferred the Southern School to the Northern one and he insisted that the Northern School was inferior. So a great debate ensued: is the realism less correct, and therefore inferior? Dong Qichan died during the Ming Dynasty, and so knew nothing about the tragedies which happened during the 'Cultural Revolution' from 1966 to 1970 when Shan Shui artists, particularly those who held artistic attitudes based on the Southern School of 'Scholar Painting', experienced an incredibly hard time. However complicated the dispute was, the fact is that the Northern School competed with the Southern School in Chinese art history.

First, let us review the ideas of the painters who we think are the original discoverers and contributors to the ideas and the techniques of Shan Shui art. It is said that **Li Sixun** (651-715), **Wu Daozi** (first half of 8th century) and **Wangwei** (701-761), masters of the **Tang Dynasty** (618-907) contributed to the basic techniques of Chinese landscape painting. Among them, **Li Sixun** preferred the colourful landscape which is named as **Qinlu Shan Shui** (landscape painting with mainly blue and green colours plus golden outlines); **Wu Daozi** developed the skills of using brushes. **Wangwei**, the poet-painter created the 'Xeyi' Shan Shui [2] that had a tremendous influence on all Chinese fine art and became the most important feature of Chinese Scholar Painting [3]. Although none of their

2 landscape made with a very free manner of using brushes and inks, concentrating on expression of the ideas, feelings and emotions of the painters.

3 Another name of Xeyi painting, the painting for intellectuals to express their ideas and feelings, in which the quality of likeness is rather less important than emotional expression.



works survived, the copies of them and later development both in painting and art-criticism support the above view.

JIN-GUAN TRADITION

Jinhau (about 855-915) was the leading figure of Shan Shui art in the 'Five Dynasties' (907-960), a very short, unstable period in Chinese history between Tang and Song. He noted his experiences of painting landscape in 'Notes on the Use of Brush', in which he put forward his aesthetic ideas as 'Six Necessities' [4] which was the foundation for the establishment of the Northern style in the Song Dynasty. Another painter who worked in the same period was called **Guantong**. We know little about his life, only that he was born in Changan (now Xian), and was a pupil of Jinhau. He successfully developed the methods for depicting the foliage and rocks, called **Cunfa**, an unique but systematic technique of Chinese painting for representing different textures of objects. Both of them observed the Taihang mountains in northwest China. It is evident that the skill they developed and landscape images they created such as the precipitous cliffs, solidity and weightiness of the rocks are related to the geographical characteristics of the region where they were based. They were basically realistic and their ideas were followed by **Licheng** (919-967) who had closely observed the Yellow Plateau, "excelled in the difficult category of flat recession views and painted rocks 'like clouds'." [5]

4 The name of the book and the principles of 'Six Necessities or Needs' is author's translation. *Notes of Using Brush* is an important aesthetic document in the development of Chinese art. We shall discuss this further.

5 The Arts Council of Great Britain: *Chinese Painting and Calligraphy From The Collection of Jhon M. Crawford JR*, the Victoria and Albert Museum, London 1965. p. 18.

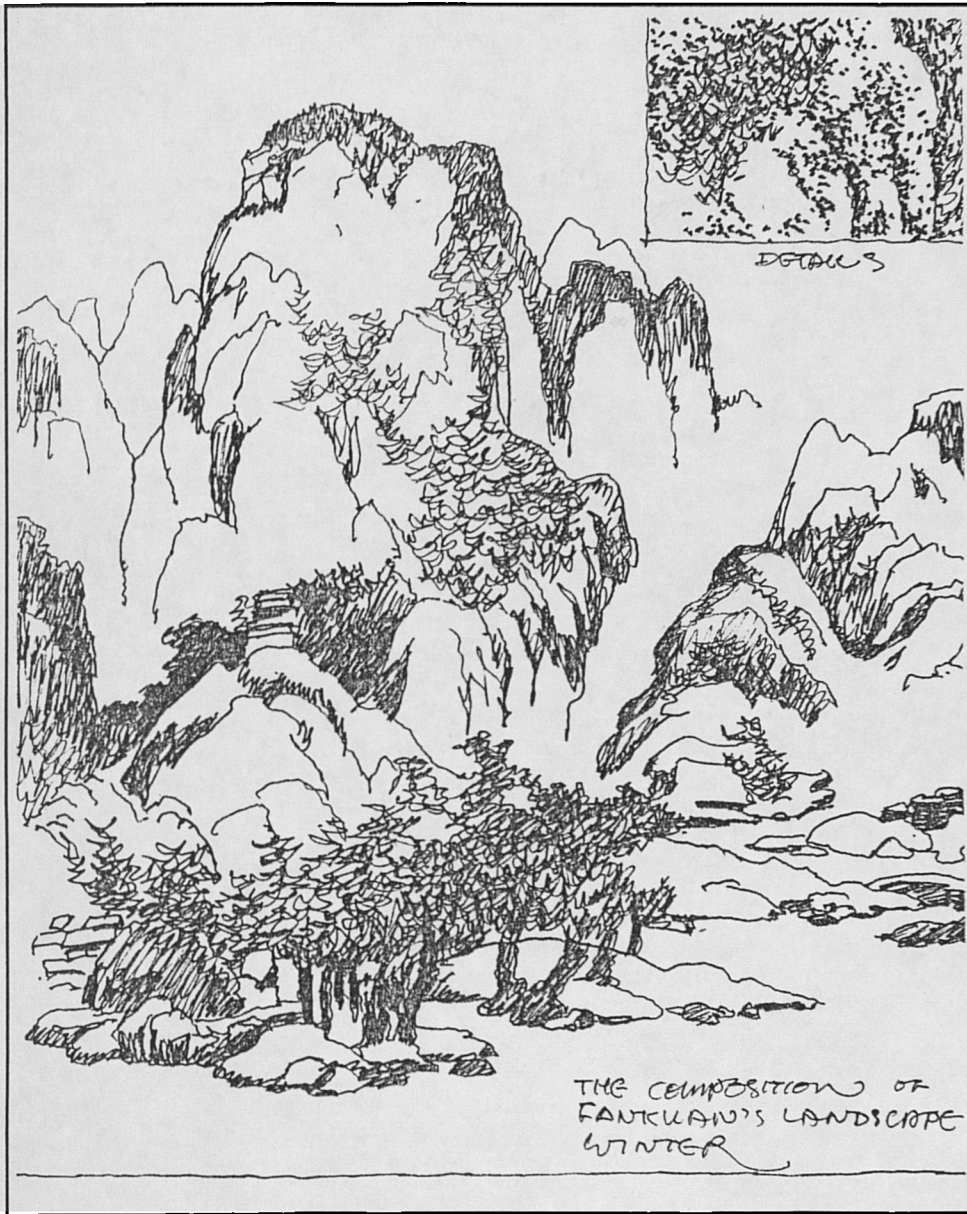


Fig. 6-3: Fankuan (950-1030?): 'Winter Landscape'.

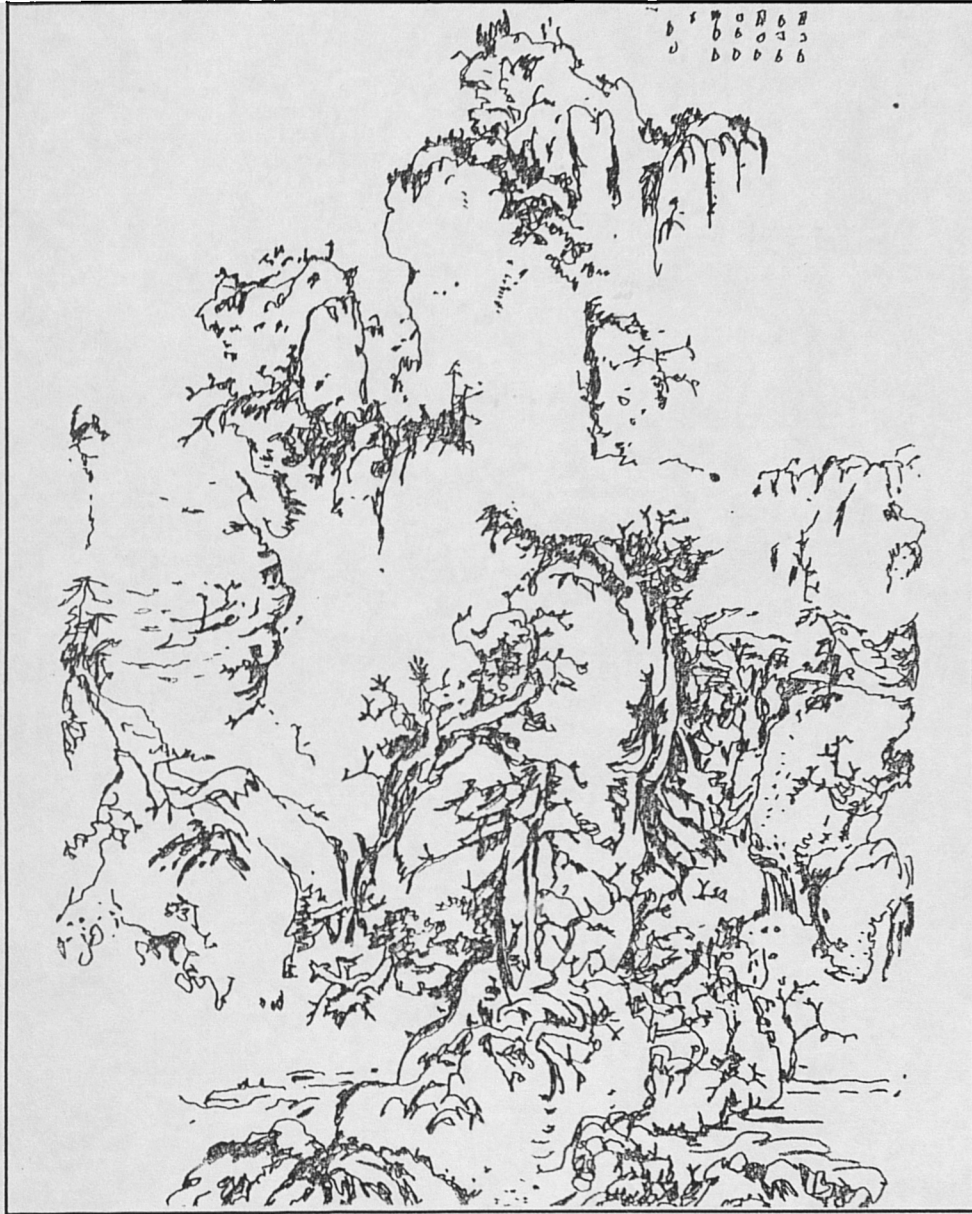


Fig. 6-4: Goxi: 'Early Spring'.

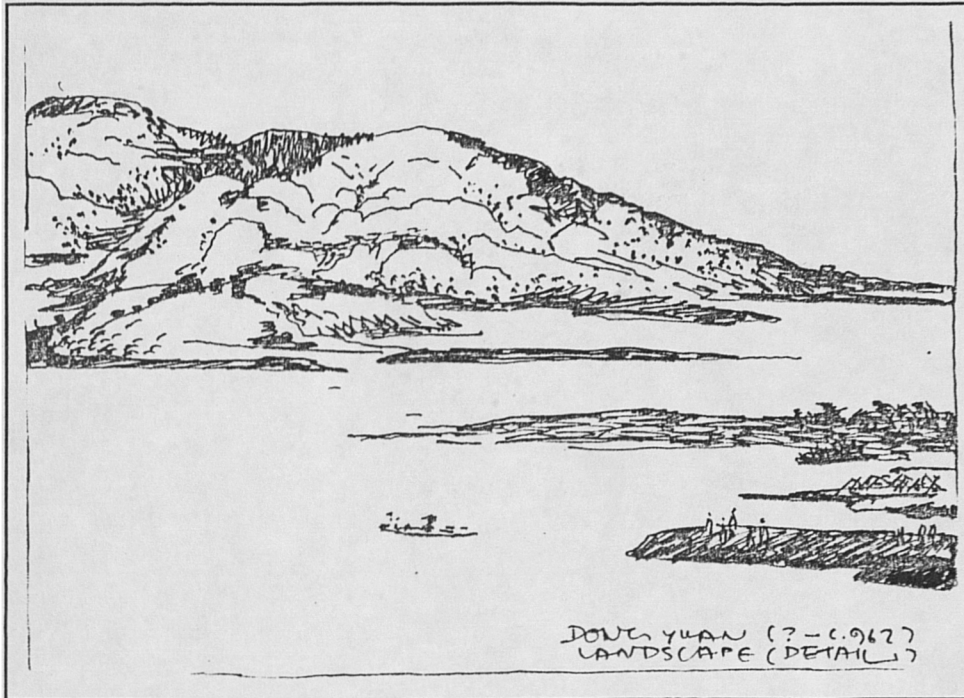


Fig. 6-5: Dongyuan (?-c. 962): Landscape.

Fankuan (950-1030?) was one of the most important painters at the beginning of the Northern Song Dynasty. He inherited the achievements of Jinhau and Guantong and further developed the rich and solid painting style, particularly the way he used brushes as if chiseling and digging a stone, the so-called “Spear Brush” technique which displayed the great potential of ink and brushes and further developed the skills of depicting the qualities of mountains in northern China [Fig. 6-3].

Goxi, another important figure, studied in the Royal Academy of the Song dynasty from 1068 to 1077. We are very familiar with his painting. He insisted on using his painting brush vertically like Chinese writing, and the marks left by following this method look smooth and forceful. He always made the effects of his ink misted in order to render distance and space; his *Cunfa* is called “the Face of a Ghost”, a casual



way to represent the quality of the complicated texture and weight of natural objects. It may be the origin of the idea: “to gain order from the disordered” i.e. by softening the contrast and therefore unifying them [Fig. 6-4]. In short, following the so-called JIN-GUAN TRADITION, the early Chinese landscape painting in the North was realistically oriented. The sublime images of the northern landscape were studied by these artists who then developed a series of techniques for meeting the needs of representing the kind of landscape they observed.

DONG-JU TRADITION

While the Northern Chinese painters concentrated on observing and representing the sublimity of mountain and water, in the south, along the Yangzi river, a talented group was inspired by the gentle mountain and water of ‘The South of the River’. The two important pioneers here were **Dongyuan** (?-c. 962) and **Juran** (?). Both of them were from Jinling (now Nanjing) and were the founders of the so-called ‘**Dong-Ju tradition**’ which foreshadowed the Southern School. Looking at the pictures and comparing them with the northern Shan Shui images, such as solid mountain stands towering like a solemn giant and the spring gushes and shines over the precipitate rocks, the features of Dong-Ju paintings are much more quiet and subtle; like after rain when the hard mountain has been softened and stretched boundlessly, the distant hills float and fade out by turn, the fisherman sings when rowing cross the water, and the spring water glides over the weathered rocks making a gentle noise. Dongyuan and Juran in turn developed a series of specific techniques for this kind of landscape. The marks of their brush are dry and casual, the ink varying in tone depicts different layers; the colour following the gentle atmosphere is light and faded. In short, there is nothing dramatic, only a little peace, solitude, remoteness, atmosphere. This is what we call ‘Wu’s Clothing’



[6]. Since then, the differences between the Shan Shui of the North and South have gradually emerged: the former depicting northern mountains and water which is forceful and sublime with a painting style that is formal, careful and usually coloured; the latter depicting the landscape of southern China, the image painted mostly by ink and brush is gentle, the manner of painting is casual, but a high understanding of Yi and painting technique is highly demanded [Fig. 6-5].

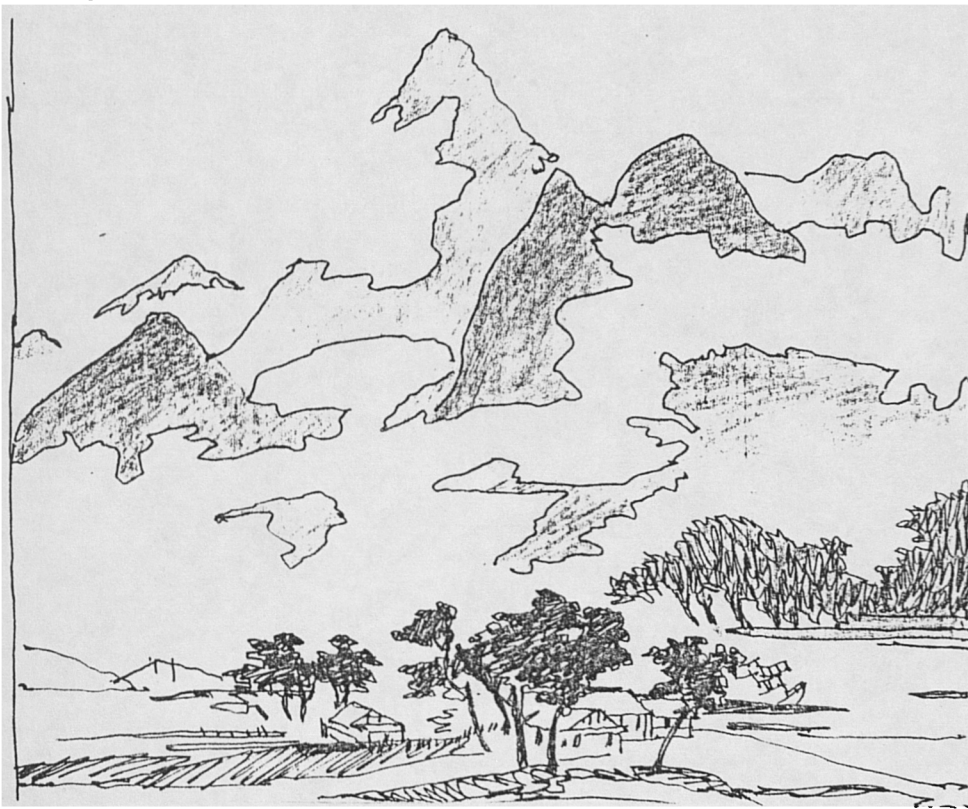


Fig. 6-6: Mifu : Landscape, ink on paper, dated 1102.

⁶ Wu: The general name of south-east of China. also the name of the kingdom established in this area about 770 BC. - 474 B C.



FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Based on the achievement of the Dong-Ju style, Mifu (1052-1107) emerged as a representative of pure Scholar Painting and his son Mi Youren (1086-1165) began a new style of Chinese landscape painting by the so-called 'dropping ink' technique, working on a dampened painting surface. In their paintings the concept of Yi (idea, meaning, feeling, emotion, etc.) had become the most important means of appreciating and practising Shan Shui art. In Mifu's words, the way to make a painting and the outcome expected is: "Casually the painting has been made, mostly there is the cloud and mist that enshrouds trees and mountains; nothing more is here, but the Yi." [7] This was a great leap forward for Chinese Scholar Painting. From then on, there was an artistic tendency to move from the objective to the subjective, and the concept of Yi has registered great significance in Chinese art and left an indelible impression on the landscape [Fig. 6-6]. Interestingly, Mifu fell madly in love with stone, and was perhaps the first Chinese scholar who spoke out for the abstract aesthetic value of this natural material. He called stone his 'brother' and even worshipped a fantastic stone (the natural creation) on bent knees. [8] This has not only influenced the aesthetic style of later Shan Shui painters, but also that of landscape designers.

Continuing the great prosperity of Chinese fine art in the Northern Song Dynasty, Shan Shui painting was further developed in the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279), although the South Song survived only 150

⁷ Author's translation from Lu Yanshoa: *Shan Shui Painting*, People's Publishing House of Fine Art, 1980, Beijing.

⁸ Admiring stone has more than thousand years history in China. which greatly influenced Chinese landscape design and that of those far Eastern countries. Also, it was imitated by the English in 17th-18th centuries. This is a very important point we shall develop our discussion in Part 3. The reference here is Tongjun: *The Record of the Gardens in the South of Yanzi River*, The Publishing House of Architectural Industry, Beijing, China, 1984. p.16.



years and faced invasion from time to time from the Mongolians in north China.

Among the great masters of the South Song, the first who should be mentioned is **Litang** (c. 1049-1130). He was from a humble background, and depended on selling his paintings to earn a living. But he initiated a new style: "Seeking simplicity and abandoning trivial details," this style developed into a well known landscape feature. His successors **Mayuan** (1190-1224, who worked in Royal Academy) and **Xiagui** (1195-1224, who also worked in the Royal Academy) fully developed this painting idea. Their refined landscape compositions are called 'The Corner of Ma' and 'The Edge of Xia' by Chinese critics. Their influences have been felt throughout the Far East [Fig. 6-7 and Fig. 6-8-A and Fig. 6-8-B].

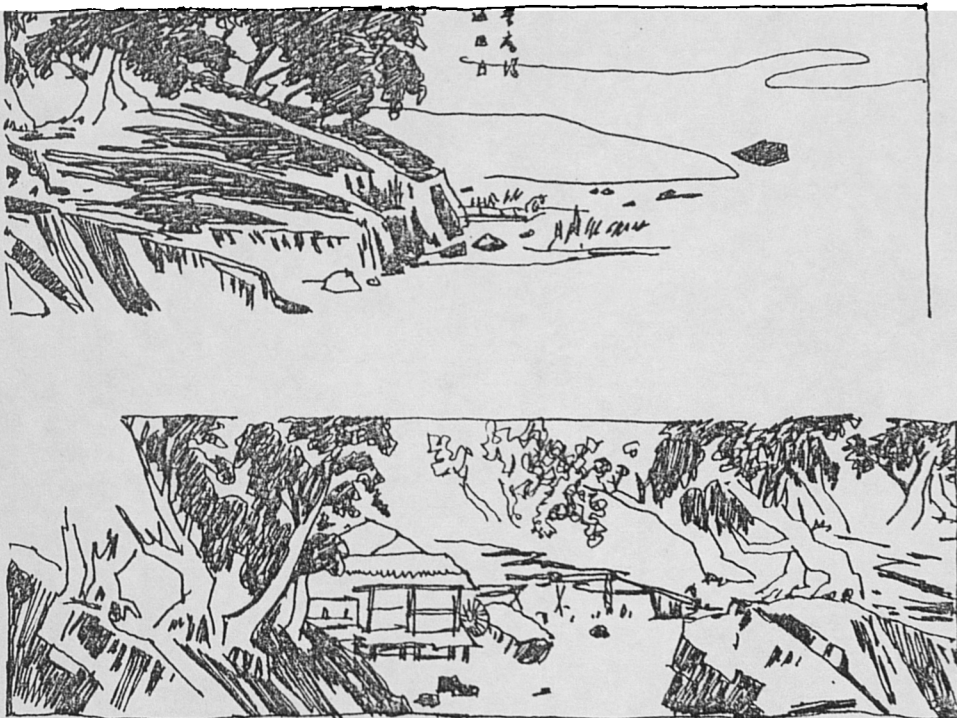


Fig. 6-7: Litang: Landscape

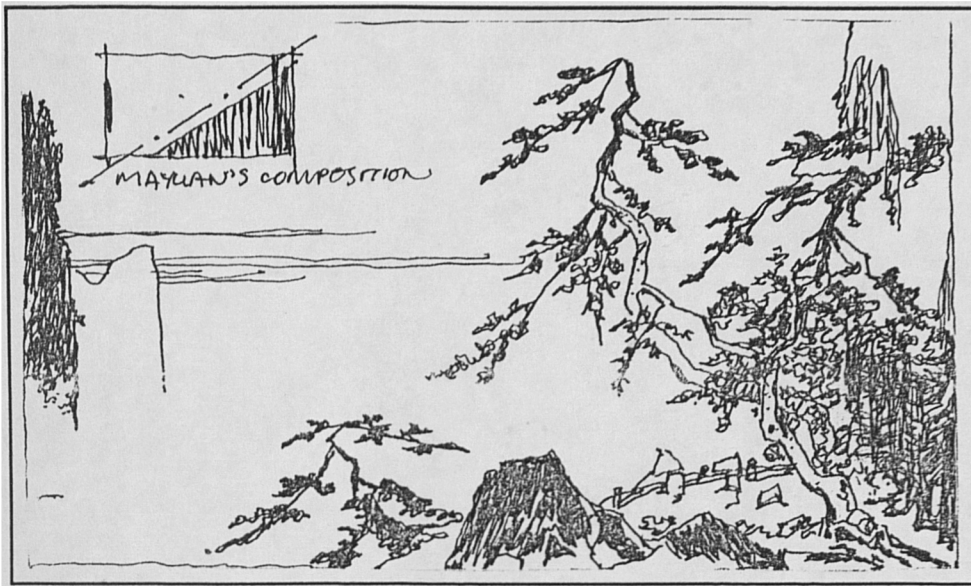


Fig. 6-8-A: Mayuan: Landscape.

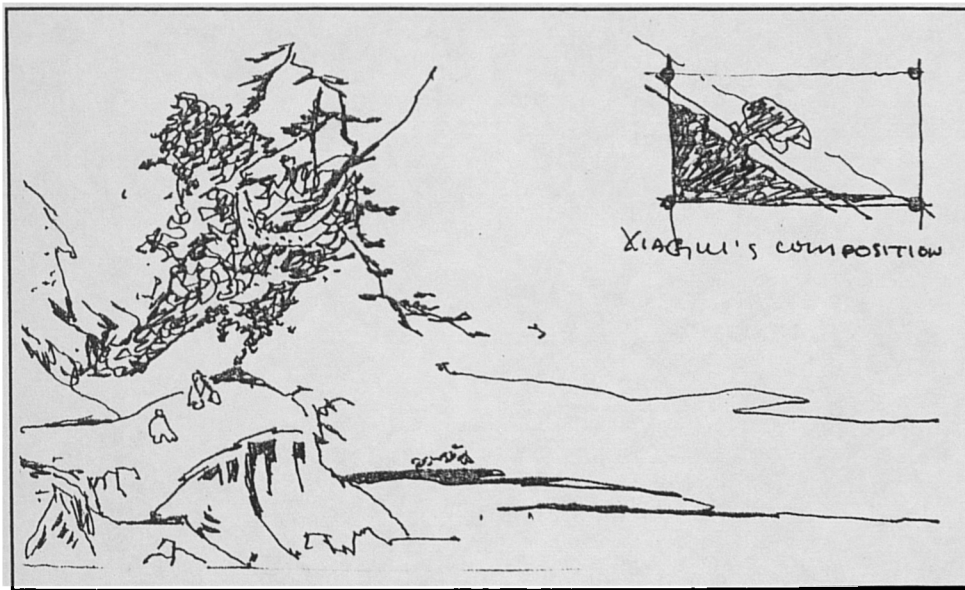


Fig. 6-8-B: Xiagui (1195-1224): Talking with friend under pines by Precipice, ink on silk.

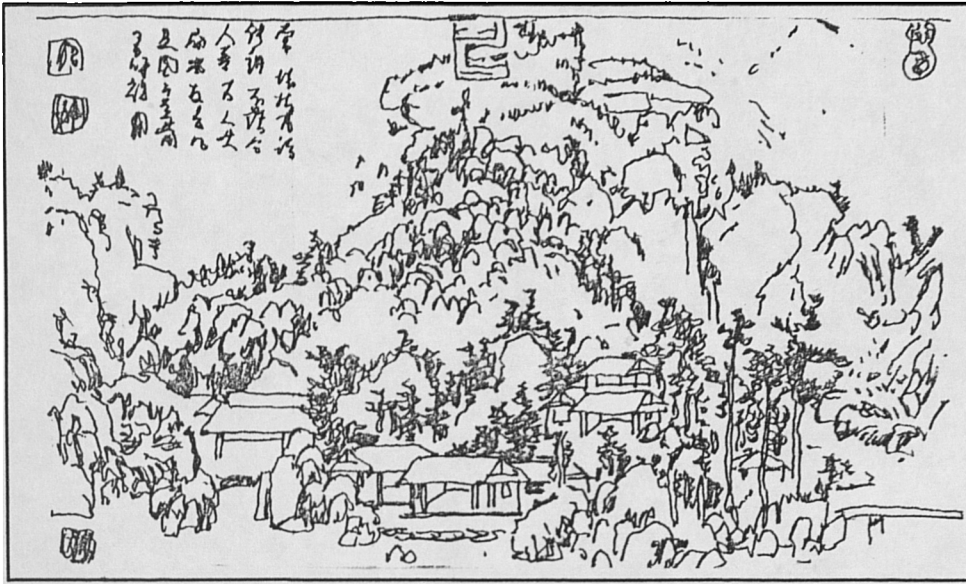


Fig. 6-9: Hung Gonwang: Mountain Village.

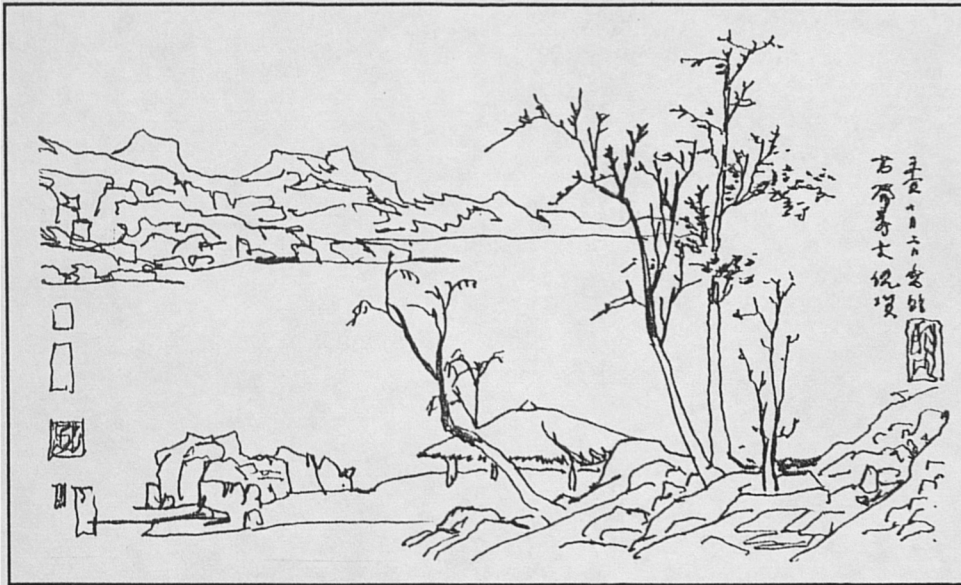


Fig. 6-10: Yizan: Landscape.



Fig. 6-11: Wangmon: Landscape.

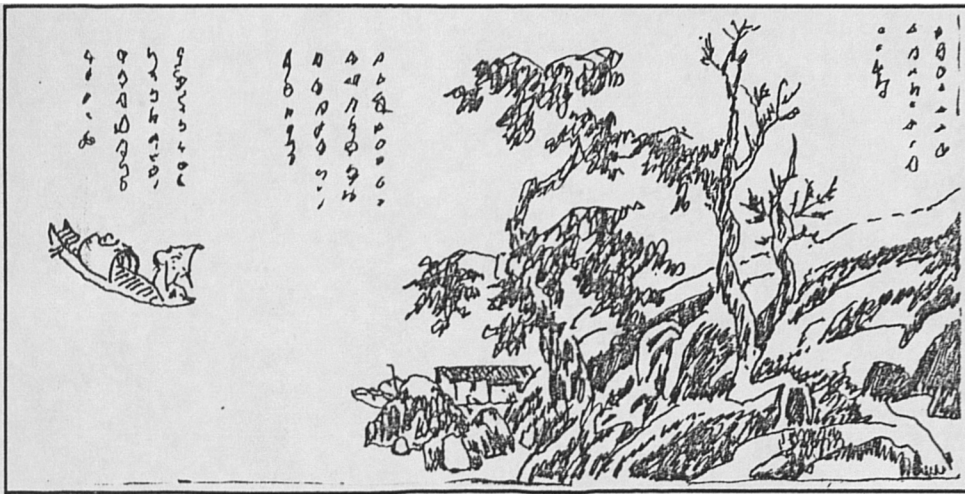


Fig. 6-12: Wuzhen: Fishermen (detail).

It was in the very dark ages of Chinese history, during Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), that Shan Shui painting achieved another climax. The painting style changed abruptly. The vigorous and grandiose landscape images in Tang and Song paintings had gone, the links with the secular life had almost disappeared. What was left were the intense personal understandings, feelings and emotions expressed by the dissolute pictures of Shan Shui on paper. [9]

In landscape painting, there were four painters, called 'Four Masters of Yuan' who, in Chinese art history, strongly influenced the Chinese Scholar Painting. They are **Hung Gonwang** (1269-1354), **Wangmon** (1308-1385), **Yizan** (1307-1374), and **Wuzhen** (1280-1354). What is most interesting here is that through their practice, they completed the circle of Chinese Scholar painting begun by the Tong masters and developed by the Song masters. Since then, the kind of painting like 'Home of Feeling' [10] and made as if 'Naturally So' [11] has become the

9 It is in this period that Chinese painting began to be painted mainly on very absorbent Chinese paper.

10 See chapter 10.



main feature of Chinese landscape art. With this development, a pure intellectual art in the world matured [Fig. 6-9, 6-10, 6-11, 6-12].

With landscape painting, a refined landscape language system was founded by the masters in which the potential of monochromatic ink and brush was developed to an extremely high level to demonstrate what the painter felt in the life and being of 'mountain and water'. Take Yizan's painting for example; there is rarely any thing colourful, only a bare hill, a half dead tree, a lonely fisherman, a simple hut and a piece of blank white left on the scroll. Although he was inspired by the landscape beside Tai lake, he intentionally made the colour pale; he chose to make the tree old and lonely; he wanted to tell what he felt rather than what he saw. Yet, in contrast to the bleak landscape images, the quality of his calligraphy and seals on the scroll is extremely high and delicate. There is no doubt that the way he used ink and brush demonstrates the high quality of artistic discipline and education he received. Moreover, he painted as though in a "monologue" for himself rather than anyone outside his feelings.

Although those masters lived in different places and expressed themselves in different styles, preferring their own painting technique, one thing in common between them all was to make the landscape speak, speak about feelings and emotions: the sadness of their homeland ruled by the intruder, their personal aloofness from secular life and values. The secret path of the Chinese Scholar is to approach the highest value of landscape art. For them, their best friends are the deep mountain, the wild water. They draw on their own spiritual strengths from the Mountain and Water.

After the short lived dynasty of Yuan, a so-called Chinese Renaissance era came in during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

¹¹ 'Naturally So' is an important aesthetic category in Chinese landscape philosophy which derives from understanding the philosophy of Tao. This is a key aesthetic issue which we shall discuss in Part 3: Tao In Landscape.



Unfortunately, the Chinese feudal tradition was too strong to be reformed by the newly developed commercial economy as there was no fundamental change in Chinese social life. The situation in the later period of Ming was even worse than before. However in the area of fine art and literature, there was nonetheless a revival of the Chinese classical tradition. That is why Dong Qichan could establish his theory of the Northern versus Southern School — by reviewing the whole evolution process of Shan Shui art.

In the Ming Dynasty, there were two important figures who had relatively high reputations in Shan Shui art. The first is **Shenzhou** (1427-1509), the second is **Wen Zhenming** (1470-1559). Both of them were born in the south. Shenzhou following the Dong-Ju tradition, studied Hung Gonwang and Wangmon in his middle years and followed the art of Wuzhen in his later years. He inherited the tradition of the ‘Scholar Painting’, reviving the art he thought of as classical. Although he made no fundamental contribution to landscape ideas, he enhanced the prestige of Scholar Painting in the mind of Chinese intellectuals. Wen Zhenming was influenced by Shenzhou. He was known for reviving “an exquisiteness perhaps unrivalled by any Ming master.” [12] He painted some scrolls to depict the life of a typical sage, the homes and gardens of those intelligent men. Interestingly, it was in nearly the same period that the Renaissance painters in the West were inspired by the ideal of Virgil’s description of life in the Golden ages. [13] Wen Zhenming was also highly expert in

12 Exquisiteness is one of the most important qualities of Chinese Scholar painting. It is revealed into only in Chinese art, but also in the painting of Western classical and certain kinds of northern landscape such as the landscape paintings of Holland and Britain. The quotation is from *The Art Council of Great Britain: Chinese Painting and Calligraphy From The Collection of Jhon M. Crawford JR*, the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 1965. p.18.

13 See chapter 4, the paragraph: Along the Classical Road.



garden design. [14] Unlike the Renaissance in the West, the Ming masters were the followers of a continuing tradition of Chinese classical art, more like the Mannerists following the High Renaissance, and so their contributions to Chinese art were limited by perpetuating this attitude. Still they analyzed and summarized the theory and experiences of Scholar Painting, such as the art practiced by Shenzhou and the writings by Dong Qichan [Fig. 6-13, 6-14 and 6-15].



Fig. 6-13: Shenzhou: 'Poet on a Mountain'.

14 Tongjun: *The Record of the Gardens in the South of Yanzi River*, The Publishing House of Chinese Building Industry, Beijing, China, 1984, p.47.



Fig. 6-14: Wen Zhenming: 'Cypress and Rock'.

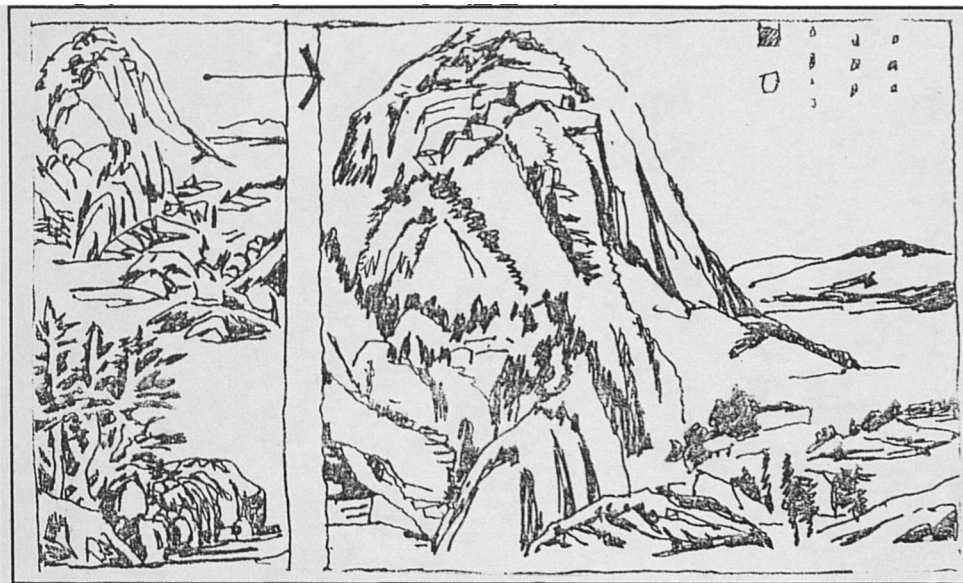


Fig. 6-15: Dong Qichan: Landscape.



The last climax of the Xeyi Shan Shui (Scholar Painting) was in the Qing Dynasty (1636-1911), the most miserable era for the nation, particularly in the late Qing, the old kingdom ruled by a small Royal family from a northern minority, Man. The nation looked so tired, like a old man who could only live in the memory of his glorious past. However, the tradition was still there, the intellectuals [15] were still thinking about the destiny of the nation. Although they were not heroes and escaped from reality from time to time, they did keep their own dignity and the continuation of the Chinese art tradition. **Gongxian** (c. 1620-1689), **Zhuda** (c. 1625-c.1700) and **Shitao** (1642-1718) were typical of those intellectuals who chose landscape art as the medium to express their philosophies, their passion for the old land and sadness at its miserable destiny. Ironically, it was the painful reality that planted the seeds for the last flower of Shan Shui art. Although they still followed the tradition, they stood on the shoulders of ancient giants who saw the landscape, imagined the scenes, painted their own Shan Shui which was full of emotion, and developed splendid skills [Fig. 6-16, and 6-17 and 6-18]. In their painting all sorts of qualities of landscape art parallel to those of highly regarded Western landscape painters are revealed. [16] In their works, we can find the “taste” of Dong-ju’s exquisiteness developed in the late Five-Dynasties, the painting philosophy, “less is more” [17] developed by Litan, in the South Song; the painting expertise of the Four Masters of Yuan. Here, we can even find a similarity with the hunting forest and the bleak mountains depicted by the Germans such as Grünewald and Albrecht Altdorfer, and the emotional landscape depicted by the

15 In China, there are two choices for an intellectual: the first is to sell yourself for benefit ignoring whatever asked to do; Second is to keep your dignity ignoring any kind of loss in life. Here the intellectuals were belong to the latter.

16 We shall discuss this in next chapter, the Romantic art in detail.

17 Though this is a refined western saying by Mies to explain his design philosophy, the idea was practiced by the Chinese painting masters more than 1000 years ago.



Romantics in Britain. The splendour of Chinese Scholar painting and the expressive potential of the Chinese painting media were fully rediscovered by the masters of the early Qing Dynasty. The Chinese Shan Shui art, therefore, achieved an unprecedented and unexpected high point in the last feudal Kingdom, profoundly influencing Chinese aesthetic style and landscape design philosophy.

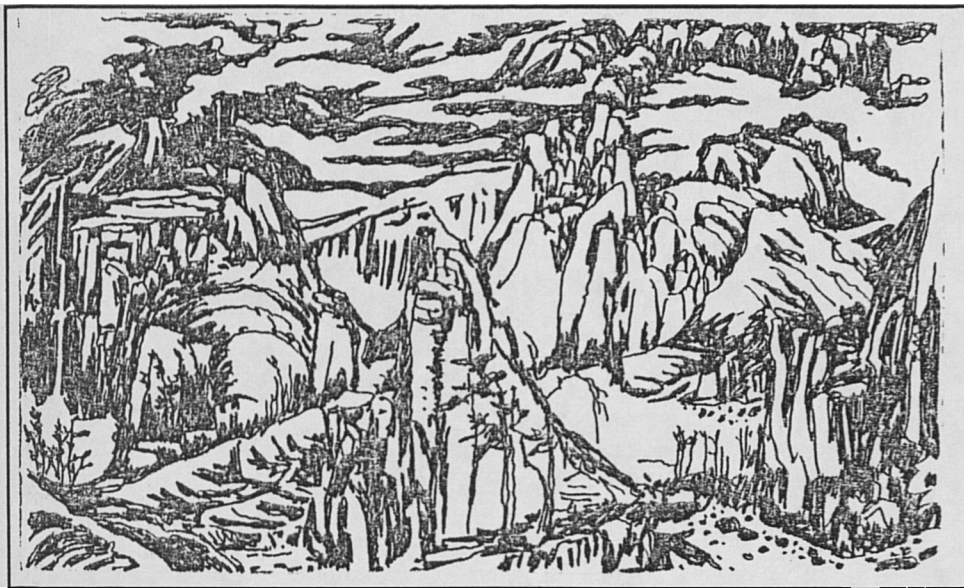


Fig. 6-16: Gongxian: Landscape.

CONCLUSION

Reviewing the history we have found that the change of painting styles is obvious but we hardly find a clear boundary between the painters and the styles to divide them in such way of The North versus the South, particularly in the Tang and Song periods. The reason the Southern School came to be valued so highly may be explained as follow:

As regards aesthetics, the abstract sense or spiritual aspects in the art and theory of Shan Shui art became more and more important and even dominated the realm after the Song Dynasty. The soft, gentle and graceful features of the southern landscape displayed a great attraction to those



painters who were based in the South, highly educated and influenced by Chinese philosophies. For instance, from the thoughts of Tao, the idea of “to be strong or hard, keep the role of softness” had become one of the most popular doctrines among most Chinese intellectuals who preferred an implicit manner to a superficial one; therefore, to catch the subtle qualities of the ‘softness’ played a crucial role in art practice and philosophical thinking. Connected with Chinese painting media, ‘rice paper’, Chinese brushes and ink are soft and gentle in nature, which certainly demands a skill to control, revealing the inner force of the painters and provide them with the opportunity to search for a certain kind of subtlety of painted landscape images, rather than simply to produce landscape pictures.

First, in terms of social context, the northern borders of China seemed unsafe for many centuries. This may have provided certain psychological pressures in the minds of Chinese intellectuals. Secondly, the weather in the North is much colder than in the South, and some regions even lack water; the landscape may be sublime but definitely not comfortable. The hardship of the life in the North separated people, artist and landscape. Thirdly, the Chinese economic centre had moved to the South after the Tang Dynasty, since the main Chinese economic base of agriculture was much more prosperous in southern China. Meanwhile, benefiting from the efficient use of canals in the South, convenient transportation promoted communication between the commercial centres such as Nanjing, Hangzhou, etc. both in terms of economy and art. Therefore, the level of culture and education in the South was relatively higher than that of the North.

Although in theory an uneducated person could be a painter, in practice that is not the case of Chinese Scholar Painting, since painting, writing (calligraphy), poetry and music are seen as the four basic disciplines of a typical scholar in ancient China, and what is more, a high morality and understanding of traditional thoughts were also seen as part



of the qualities of those 'men of taste'. All this might cultivate the preference of those Chinese intellectuals and promoted the study of the subtlety with great concern of the beauty of softness or gentleness in the art.

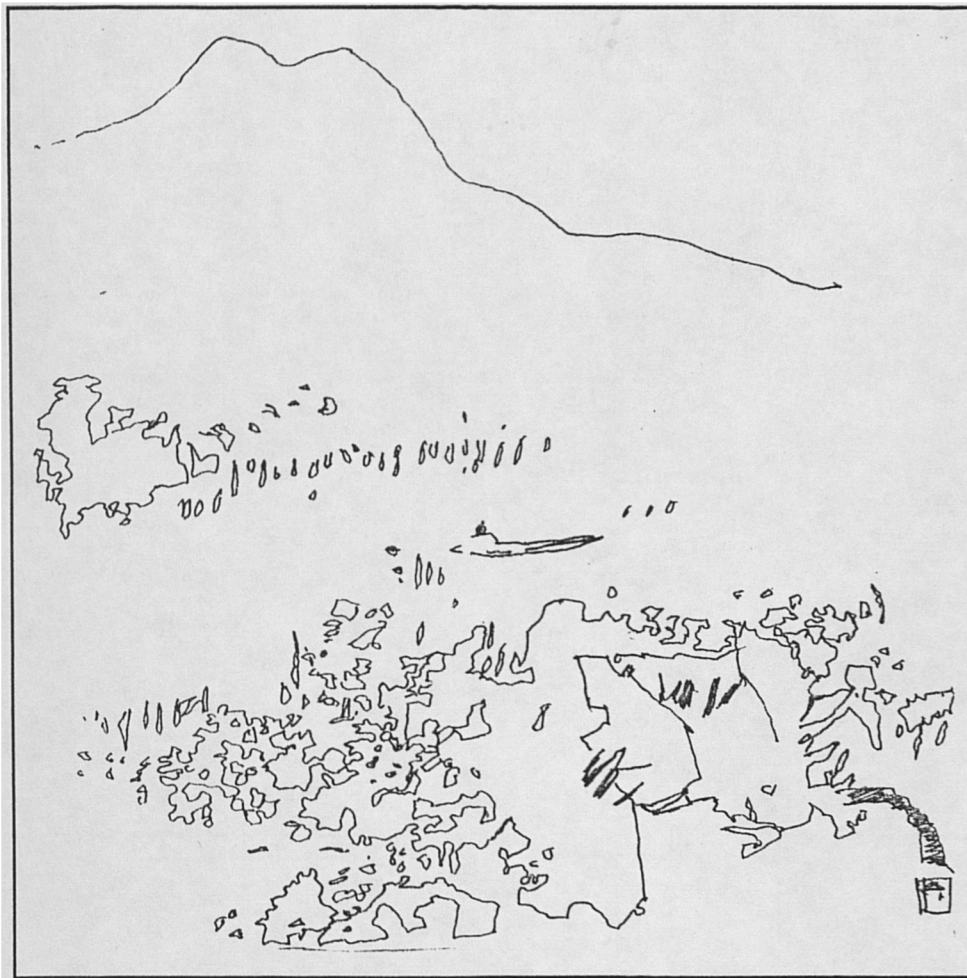


Fig. 6-17: Shitao: Landscape.



Fig. 6-18: landscape by Hang Binhong



6.3 THE CLASSICAL AESTHETIC IDEAS

The difficulty facing the Shan Shui painter is how to find the way to gain true knowledge of nature and transfer abstract knowledge into concrete art images through Shan Shui language. In a country where traditional influence is strong, the works of old masters are so impressive, their artistic achievements so high and their use of the media (ink and brush) so distinctive, that their successors cannot easily find a way to escape the domination of history. Chinese artists find their individuality very special by constantly studying the traditional theories and paintings by old masters. Shan Shui art and life are instinctively related to each other, and personal experiences form an important source of different art images and aesthetic standing. That is also the reason that the features of art vary in different times, although all the painters claim they follow the same tradition.

Thus the more crucial issue in the study of the aesthetics of Chinese landscape painting is the aesthetic theory itself.

XEHE'S 'SIX PRINCIPLES'

From engraving to using soft brushes to paint; from pure decoration or depicting narrative stories to combining writing with painting, thinking with images or expressing emotion by refined landscape forms, ancient Chinese artists summarized their own aesthetic experiences in many ways.

Among those, 'SIX PRINCIPLES' by Xehe (South Qi Dynasty, 479-502 in the Northern and Southern Dynasty about 479-502), is one of the most influential early theories. It is a milestone of traditional Chinese aesthetics which inherited the past and ushered the future.

In order of importance the Six Principles are listed below:



1. Vigour Chi (Breath) and rhyme;
2. Brush (ink marks) with a sound structure;
3. Form follows object;
4. Colour follows content;
5. Management of position;
6. Transmission and copy from the past. [18]

The first of the 'Six Principles' is general, but crucial for appreciating painting which relates to the inner world of artists and emphasizes the quality of general atmosphere and spiritual expression. The 'vital spirit' is a paraphrase of the Chinese word **Chi** [19] which here refers to the 'breath' or 'air' of a painting, an important element in Chinese aesthetics. Although it is undoubtedly vague and mystical, it has been explained by different artists from different points of view in different eras.

The second principle is a very typical Chinese one. Some say **Chinese painting is the art of lines**. This is mostly true, since the Chinese way of defining space or depicting objects is not dependent on perspective with a central focus, representing the effect of light and shadow in the western sense, but on a specific quality of outline, diffusion of focus, and a varied relationship of 'black and white'. Thus, the way of moving the brush demands a high level of art discipline. 'Brush with a sound structure' means everything to a Chinese painter; it relates to the forms, textures and inner emotional forces. This principle not only refers to a structural method of using the brush, but also to the painter's personal

18 Author's translation.

19 Chi, in Chinese has different meanings. While this word will appear in following chapters quite often, we will indicate the specific meaning in different context.



development and confidence in painting; it is practical to an extent, but belongs mostly to a spiritual category of aesthetics.

The principles, 'Form follows Object' and 'Colour follows Content', reflects a Chinese realistic attitude towards objects from the Jing to Tang period which emphasizes the objective world. But unlike the realism in the West, the Chinese realistic attitude is still dominated by the first two principles, the images refined in their way of seeing and rendering.

The fifth principle, 'Management of Position', does not only relate to pictorial composition, but as an intellectual process which is more important and relates to the way of seeing and painting. For instance, artistic imaging, thinking, studying, analyzing and the necessary refinement or rejection of forms for composing pictures are an essential pragmatic creative process in which the raw materials are selected or abandoned and organized or integrated as a whole painting. Here, the way of thinking is still crucial.

The final principle relates to the way of learning: 'Transmission and copy of the past'. It is necessary for Chinese painters to learn from predecessors, but it does not mean trying to be merely a good imitator of the old masters (but some hopeless painters in history often did misunderstood this). The motive for the act of "copying" is to deepen the understanding of an invaluable heritage. It is a taking process, since painting is a very practical, yet can only be practiced correctly, only after experiencing, reading, and thinking of how the old masters worked and thought. Thus, 'Transmission' is an inevitable outcome of discerning the truth of art by oneself rather than by only copying from predecessors. For the learner, in order to achieve an aesthetic understanding through experiences of life and real observations, to find himself in the process of meditation, he must know the difference between him and the old masters. This knowing is not simply connected with painting technique, but also the feelings depicted. What is more, in the Chinese mind, culture is seen as a



national treasure which should be accumulated, improved, enriched by all generations; there is no contradiction between continuation and reformation.

The Chinese aesthetic system has its own characteristics of progression. Before Xehé's 'Six Principles', theories about visual art had developed as early as in the Eastern Jin Dynasty (AD 317-420) when **Liusi**, a great aesthetician, in his work '**Wen Xin Diao Long**', put forward his aesthetic views by summarizing artistic experiences from the Qing Dynasty (221-206 BC) and the Han Dynasty (206-220 BC) to the Eastern Jin. He was concerned about a wide range of aesthetic issues such as the function, content, forms and feeling of art, and discussed key topics such as the inseparable relationship between feeling and objects; the experiencing process from feeling to reason; the quality of feeling and emotion itself, the acceptable use of exaggeration or the beauty obtained from a more delicate implied visual art.

His contemporary, the famous painter **Gu Kaizhi**, also wrote a thesis on painting concerned with the relationship of pictorial structure, figure and environment or atmosphere. He showed the importance in discerning an artistic spirit and gaining wonderful ideas through profound thinking thereby achieving a dialogue between the subjective and objective world. He indicated the spiritual importance of a figure and the characteristics of an environment. He was the first painter in Chinese art history to insist on spiritual expression by the forms, which founded a realistic base for the art and set up an expressive style for the future. From Gu Kaizhi to Xehé, revealing of spirit and realistic depiction of objects were emphasised. In this sense, they are very 'classical'.

Then came **Zhang Yanyuan**, another important art theorist and critic in the Tang Dynasty, through his '**On Six Principles**' who developed the 'Six Principles' further. His most influential concept was "To have an idea before moving the paint-brush" and, "After revealing the idea, no more marks are needed." For him the concept of Yi was seen as



the most important in painting. This change of aesthetic principle from the emphasis on depicting objective forms to Yi (ideas and feelings) arose from the magnificent development of Shan Shui painting at that time and was promoted by those scholars who preferred the monochromatic Xeyi landscapes [20]. Here, we must mention the great genius, poet and painter Wangwei again. It was he who combining a poetic mood with landscape pictures, started the epoch of scholarly painting. In this sense, the art of Shan Shui had somehow become 'Romantic' in nature.

This fundamental change of the aesthetic viewpoint also greatly influenced the understanding and explanation of Xehe's 'Six Principles' by his successors. The first of the 'Six Principles' was then chosen as the leading idea in art theory and practice. The search for vigour of Chi, the vital spirit and rhyme, was seen as most important in the process of appreciating and painting landscape. Following this abstract idea, the quality of brush and ink, using 'brush (marks) with a sound structure', was developed from a pragmatic principle into one of spirit. The way of using brush and ink was understood as an expression of the vitality of Chi and rhyme, the key approach to Yijing, an artistic image combining feeling with scenery, [21] the highest realm of Shan Shui art.

JINHAU'S 'SIX NECESSITIES' (FIVE DYNASTIES 907-960)

Jinhau in the Five Dynasties (907-960) had changed Xehe's 'Six Principles' to his 'Six Importance or Necessities': CHI, RHYME, THOUGHT, SCENERY, BRUSH AND INK. According to these principles, painting becomes more like a pure outcome of a spiritual process rather than a record of the facts or representing things observed. His 'Six Necessities' further confirmed the subjective orientation for Chinese painting. In his 'The Note of Using Brush', the concept of Chi

20 The landscape is painted in a free manner.

21 Another important category of Chinese aesthetics, see Chapter 10.



means 'heart' (idea, mind) that must lead the action of using the brush, rather than the painter being allured by the objects. Here, Chi was again seen as the most important aspect in painting. Consequently likeness in painting became less important, and could even be ignored. The way to approach artistic concepts was from the inside out with great attention to the subjective faculty of the artist.

Based on this early establishment of Chinese aesthetics, Shan Shui theory was further developed along two directions. On the one hand, Chi was thought as the result of **Li** (reason), thus the vital spirit of painting was understood as a rational being: as a rationalist of the Song Dynasty, **Wan Mingyan** (1472-1528) thought: "Outside the mind, nothing exists; without the mind, there is no reason" and, "heart (mind or feeling) is the core." Therefore, Shan Shui art was no longer an isolated artistic phenomenon, but an intellectual outcome from philosophical thinking. Following this idea, rational thinking, the painting, even the skills became extremely subjectively oriented. That is why **Mifu** insisted: "... nothing more is here, but a Yi." Here the pictorial likeness was replaced by the spiritual rightness. The latter even became the aim for some painters. This trend had a big following amongst some intellectuals, particularly those who saw art only as a kind of personal cultivation.-

On the other hand, Shan Shui painting was seen as a medium to release personal feelings and emotions, aiming to achieve a psychological balance by placing extensive feeling in certain kinds of landscape; thus technique was further developed by the Yuan and Qing Masters as mentioned before. This approach gives much weight to human emotion and feeling. Although it still follows the principle of 'an idea before the brush', there is a compromise by which Shan Shui painting goes between the subject and the object with high skill to depict both physical beings and the spirit, to place the feeling in landscape, to experience landscape and real life, and then discover and paint the harmonious relationship between the subjective and objective world. This compromise is the outstanding



contribution of the masters who worked in Yuan and the early Qing Dynasty.

To find the source of the vital spirit, to understand the qualities of nature, the way forward is “To collect all the wonderful peaks for making a draft (establishing concept).” [22] Thus, a painter should place himself in nature, observe between heaven and earth, experience real life and then achieve the highest realm of creation. Regarding methodology, “A superior man has no formula, to be free from the limitation of methods is the ‘perfect method’.” [23] Hence we can see very clearly that the development of Shan Shui theory had undergone another change: from searching for methods (such as the Six Principles or Six Necessities, and so on) and depicting landscape to denying any formula and concentrating on expressing emotions.

This further refined Chinese landscape aesthetics and linked the art with Chinese philosophies. Tao, in particular, has influenced the Chinese attitude towards landscape art, formulated ways of seeing, appreciating and representing the outside world, and, of course, greatly influenced the Chinese approach to landscape, particularly garden design.

6.4

BASIC AESTHETIC CATEGORIES OF SHAN SHUI ART

There are two levels when studying aesthetics of landscape painting. At the first level (or basic level), the subject studies history and classical theories; at the second level, the study is research into the painting itself. To some extent the second kind seems more tangible by achieving a substantial understanding of the art.

²² Author’s translation from Shitao’s Notes On painting.

²³ Author’s translation from Shitao’s Notes On painting.



In methodological terms, there are three basic categories which need to be clarified and considered:

Painting with images — Artistic Form;
Painting with reason — Artistic Logic;
Painting with feeling — Emotions [24].

ARTISTIC FORM as **state** of landscape images painted relates to some distinguished Chinese aesthetic aspects such as:

CHINESE PERSPECTIVE

LINE OF BEAUTY

INK AS FIVE COLOURS

CUNFA — basic technique of Shan Shui painting

CHINESE PERSPECTIVE

Perspective is a method of analyzing and defining space and managing different landscape forms which influences ways of depicting a landscape.

For the Chinese, the way of observing landscape is from one side to another, from one step to next, what we call 'Perspective with Scattered Focus'. There is no fixed focus in the Chinese perspective system, but free choices according to the categories of HIGH and FAR, DEEP and FAR or LEVEL and FAR, which depend on what the observer wants to see, to appreciate and to focus on.

HIGH and FAR describes great height and distance combined. For example, in order to see and depict the high and distanced image of a mountain, the position of the observer (eye-level) is placed very low, combined with imagination which is also not fixed. The result of taking or

²⁴ Form, Logic and Emotion are the main issue in a study of Landscape Morphology which will be further discussed in Part 6.



imaging this position is to obviously see considerable 'loftiness' which may evoke all those emotions that Burke considered to belong to his concept the Sublime. For the Chinese, this lofty, grand or magnificent sight is a right and suitable landscape image for expressing reverential feelings for Mountain and Water, for worship of nature and symbolizing high morality. The paintings by Tang and Northern Song Shan Shui painters are typical examples. [25]

DEEP and FAR is used to effectively convey a complex scene whose layers and depth may suggest a quality of vastness and infinity. This is the most difficult perspective in Chinese painting, since there are limitations in Chinese media of line and ink, and the hierarchy of space is very difficult to depict. Shan Shui painters invented various ways to overcome these limitations. For instance, a great painter Hang Binhong said: "Through the winding of scenery, we are led to deeper feelings." [26] To compose a DEEP and FAR picture on Chinese paper mainly involves surveying from above, seeing from a far and continuing to move the viewpoint in order to explore the images behind. In this way, composing the picture will be built up by industrial observation which is beyond the real scenery, and may be mystical or illusory. The concept of DEEP and FAR means indeed to discover, to explore different layers through changing the angles of vision and finally to promote subjective imagination by limiting the messages received.

LEVEL and FAR means to see from a very normal and undramatic position. The observer receives the images and composes the picture at a normal eye level. A horizontal emphasis can provide intimate, smooth and familiar scenery. Although the method looks simple, it can be profound. By using this perspective a huge space of a few inches, can show great

25 See chapter 6.

26 Author's translation from the description on a Huang Binhong's Shan Shui painting.



breadth of mind and reveal feelings such as sorrow, sadness, loneliness, etc., or moods such as peace, sweetness, happiness and relaxation.

These methods can be used either independently or in combination, depending on the mood of the painter; in most cases, Chinese paintings involve refined, collective and artistic images. The result is different from 'Collage', since the painting has a direct link with its objective world, and the expression is defined between abstraction and refined expression. Yet it does not depend on one fixed eye level, focusing on one or several vanishing points. In Shan Shui painting, a scene can be high, deep, and open all at the same time, following a mood either sublime, or profound or calm.

LINE OF BEAUTY

Since Chinese calligraphy has cultivated a specific way to communicate in writing and art, Line for the Chinese is the most essential medium for any kind of art form (including that of architecture, sculpture and ceramic, etc.), or we can say that it is the identity of Chinese art. Thus, Line in Chinese art has an independent position and a unique meaning in the world's art, combining visual art with written language. There is no difficulty in understanding why Line plays an essential role in depicting the images of Chinese landscape.

On Line of beauty, Huang Binhong remarked: "The more zigzag the way, the deeper the scenery," and "The winding path approaches the secluded and peaceful place," [27] which indicates that the Line can function not only as a visible form but also as an invisible lineal relationship of the whole composition which may decisively influence the atmosphere of a painting.

²⁷ This was the comment written on a Shan Shui painting by the most important landscape painter in Chinese recent history, Huang Binhong who was Professor of Zhejiang academy of Fine Art, and died in 1955.



Since Line has such an important position in Chinese art, linking the quality of calligraphy and painting with a painter's personal culture has become the symbol of spirit or temperament of any artist. As the phrase goes: "to know a person, see his calligraphy." Therefore, the way of using the paint-brush is a very decisive factor which must come before anything else in artistic disciplines.

INK AS FIVE COLOURS

Ink relates to the use of brush, the way a brush influences the quality of lines, and the lines that build the structure of a painting which as a whole embodies Yi or Ideas. This is the logic of Chinese painting, therefore other things are relatively less important. Once the potential of ink is fully developed and the idea revealed, the painting is almost complete. Thus, colour, serves to release a subjective mood or spirit rather than depicting the appearance of things, and becomes a complementary medium of Chinese landscape art. According to this stance, the striking effects of ink as the major source of the richness and spirit of painting is beyond colour or seen as "Five Colours".

CUNFA — A Symbolic depiction of nature and basic vocabulary of Chinese landscape art.

CUNFA is the systematic technique of representing the quality of object (structure and texture) which brings the message from real world into the abstract Shan Shui painting. Its refined artistic forms may also provide the typified landscape images for depicting ordinary landscape. This is again a Chinese path between reality and aesthetic ideal through a compromise between ABSTRACTION AND REALISM.



ARTISTIC LOGIC

In painting with reasoning, Chinese painters have their own logical system, which includes Chi, MANAGEMENT OF THE WHITE and SCENERY IS AS IF A PICTURE. These principles relate to Chinese philosophy.

Chi, in a context of landscape paintings, refers to the breath or air of a painting which, on the one hand, emphasize the sense of integration of composing a painting, and, on the other hand, relates the whole atmosphere of a landscape image painted. Here Chi is both practical and abstract, which is the most difficult concept of Chinese landscape painting, but also the source of attraction of this art; usually we can feel it, yet could not describe it literally.

MANAGEMENT OF THE WHITE

THIRD DIMENSION, SPACE AND ACTION (MOVEMENT)

The Chinese concept of time and space are two dimensional images plus the action of moving paint brushes. The action of changing the marks of ink reveals an understanding of time and space — the third dimension. In other words, the movement is the key to evoke the association of the third dimension. Thus, 'empty' space is desperately needed for performing the movement, and WHITE, the expressive background of painting is thus crucial.

Laozi said: "Hollow, then full." [28] Hence we can reason that the untouched part of the paper is full of meaning, i.e. the white has been managed by moving brushes and can be anything associated by painter and audience. For instance, spatial depth, boundlessness, infinity regarding the physical environment and sadness, hopelessness, tranquillity, spiritual seclusion in terms of the feelings, are suggested mostly in the form of the WHITE (Kong or Emptiness). As most Shan Shui painters recognized,

28 Lao Tzu: *Tao Te Ching*: XXII, 50, p.93, translated by D. C. Lau, Penguin Books, England, 1976..



“When drawing black, one must think about white,” i.e. to search for Richness, one should concern the source of the effect, since figures and the spaces surrounded are created by each other; rooted in each other. Aesthetically such opposites as more and less, dynamic and still, strong and weak, clumsy and skillful are the result and reason for each other. Also as Laozi thought:

“Know the white
But keep to the role of black.” [29]

CHINESE PICTURESQUE

A Chinese painting called ‘Flower and Birds’ is similar to the Western painting, Still Life. The difference is that in Chinese still life there are more living things such as birds, fish, other small animals, even insects, and so on. This kind of Chinese painting is not necessarily literal: birds are the symbol of moving things, flowers the symbol of nature. Interestingly, the way of conjuring an artistic image for the Chinese is extremely simple: even if only to pick a single branch to symbolize the whole natural phenomena. This is a typical picturesque in the Chinese sense: a way to break from the limitations of space and art media through an approach of such extreme simplicity which conveys its own implication of art methodology and evokes associations.

Moreover, as we discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the Chinese term for landscape painting, Shan Shui, is a symbolic expression of the essence of Chinese picturesque. However, this symbolic idea must be embodied by the use of Chinese painting media and conducted by a different understanding of nature and life. Thus there is still no rigid formula for the painters to follow, but a general artistic trend in terms of Chinese cultural preference.

²⁹ Lao Tzu: *Tao Te Ching*:: XXVIII, 63, p. 85.



EMOTION

In painting with feeling, emotions are related within the picture. This is the key, for Shan Shui painters involve themselves in landscape to paint landscape as a Home of Feeling. The distinguished Chinese art concept such as **Yi** (idea), **Yijing** (idea or feeling and scenery combined) demonstrate the Chinese way of expressing a painter's emotions. Meanwhile it also shows a sense of coherence in combining personal destiny with general natural phenomena. [30]

Therefore, the general characteristics of Shan Shui art are:

- a. Emphasizing the establishment of Yi (idea, feeling and emotion);
- b. Respecting the relationship between spirit and landscape images;
- c. Paying more attention to expression of feeling rather than pictorial likeness.

6.5

THE QUALITY OF SHAN SHUI PAINTING

A Chinese saying, “the writing is a mirror of the person”, suggests that any form of art is an outcome of the author’s thoughts, reflecting the quality of the person in terms of morality, education, and artistic capacity. Thus, the quality of Shan Shui art is that of the artist. What is crucial here is the philosophical basis which a painter holds in the search for the meaning of art: **Yi**

30 I shall discuss this issue in Part 3: Tao in Landscape in detail.



First of all, it is an understanding of the essence of nature which influences the quality of a painting. Shan Shui art is highly valued because of its principal philosophical stand which is based on the most mystical, but influential Chinese philosophy: **Tao**. [31] The main ideas of this philosophy are that the world as an entity consists of a myriad of things derived from an essential but hardly tangible being of Tao; It is the Tao “Born before heaven and earth”, which “confusedly formed the world.” [32] The logical structure of all beings is that “Man model themselves on earth, Earth on heaven, Heaven on the way (Tao).” [33] Hence the earth, the heaven and all creatures according to the law are organized in the whole structure, which is the meaning of Nature. [34]

Nature is not of a totally abstract form; it can also be an objective being and can be observed. A most critical task is to discern how universal changes are handled by the law of Nature. Following the law, all beings on earth under the heaven are constantly changing, overcoming, or creating each other. The essence of this complicated phenomenon is the quality of Nature that Shan Shui painters must understand, in which natural beauty lies. As Shitao said: “The flowing water makes the still mountain move; the vivid trees makes the obdurate stone alive.” [35] For a Shan Shui painter, to observe how the dynamic natural balance is achieved and composed between Shan (the symbol of Yang) and Shui (the symbol of Ying) is an important stepping stone in discerning the essence of Nature. In fact, a series of general essential qualities are revealed in Shan Shui painting, such as stillness and movement, unity and variety, locality and generality, scenery and the painter’s psychological reaction to

31 This is a key issue of this research. We will discuss it in successive chapters.

32 Lao Tzu: *Tao Te Ching*., XXV, 56, p.82.

33 Lao Tzu: *Tao Te Ching*, XXV, 56, p.82.

34 Here the word Nature on only refers to things outside or beyond humans, but includes the whole natural world and its law of evolution.

35 Author’s translation from Shitao: ‘Notes On Painting’, Zhejiang Academy of Fine Art, Hangzhou, China.



it, artifact and pure natural form, personal feeling and common sense, etc.. These qualities are embodied in landscape painting by the shapes, textures, colours (black and white), different compositions and the painter's individual way of performing with brushes and ink.

Therefore, the process of painting a Shan Shui is to see, understand and represent the quality of landscape rather than to record a place pictorially in a more limited way. When subject meets object, a Shan Shui painter experiences the scene through meditation, and then conjures up images of his own Mountain and Water which will be expressed by the personal skill he has trained in himself. The painter's capacity to discover and understand the meaning of his action is, in particular, much more important than keeping to conventional standards, such as likeness, etc.. From this point of view, a landscape painting in the Chinese mind is not merely a depiction of a beautiful composition in a natural setting, but a result of mental and physical participation.

Shan Shui art demands high standards from the painter both in understanding the essence of nature, and in depicting it in an expressive way within a limited painting media. The painter must know life well, since the understanding of the philosophy of Tao is very demanding, and includes the study of people. According to Laozi:

"He who knows others is clever,
He who knows himself has discernment.
He who overcomes others has force;
He who overcomes himself is strong.
He who knows contentment is rich;
He who perseveres is a man of purpose;
He who does not lose his station will endure;
He who lives out his days has had a long life." [36]

36 Lao Tzu: *Tao Te Ching*, XXXIII, 74, p.92.



Here, Laozi did not intend merely to present a moral code, but rather more likely to suggest a **dialectical logic** of thinking. For Laozi studying a way of thinking was more important than following conventional social conduct. [37]

Therefore, for painting, the perfection of pictures is less important than a profound understanding of nature and life; when using ink and brush, no painter, even a skillful one, can guarantee that every mark left on a piece of very absorbent Chinese paper will be perfect, but the Yi should be fully expressed. In fact, there is no need to search for such perfection in art, because beauty is not built on a merely passive understanding of the concepts such as: the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. The opposite is that no single absolute aesthetic standard has been set up by the ancient Chinese aesthetic philosophy, but a communicable artistic expression involving a continual play of both intellect and emotion. An intimate relationship between man and nature must be revealed through the highest personal standards and craftsmanship.

In short, a Shan Shui painter must observe outside, meditate inside, then find an approach for communicating with nature and life. Such a practice is a lifetime learning process, in which personal qualities are improved, and understanding of life is deepened. That is why really good Shan Shui painters are rarely seen.

37 Also see Part 3.





7

THE ART OF ROMANTICS

By reviewing the process of the evolution of landscape painting both of the West and the East, we find that it has developed from a background of narrative stories to an independent art for landscape's sake; from the depiction of factual scenery to the revealing of ideals, feelings and emotions; from a mere reference of human existence to a place where people may participate with effort and passion. Therefore landscape for the artist is not an isolated natural phenomenon, but as a circumstance connected to the destiny of mankind. Through this process of continuing discovery, landscape painting has become an effective visual medium by which to communicate with nature, and revealing passions, desires, ideals. There is no formula for the creation of this art, but a common potent inner force which drives the painters, wherever they are, to depict their place with emotions. In order to properly reveal their feelings of place, a 'design sense' is cultivated for operating this art medium. This art is based on real experience, aiming at expressing love and romantic thoughts.

7.1

A "QUAINT" TRANSLATION

The Chinese translation of the word Romanticism is '**lan-man-ism**'. In Chinese, 'Lan' means waving, dissolution, wandering or strolling; 'Man' means overflowing, all-pervasive, or infinite. Lan and



Man plus 'ism' makes real sense of the word Romanticism, since it is very close to the general meaning of the original Western term. This translation is so clever and quaint that it has made the term Romanticism Chinese both in sound and in the approximate meaning. Thus, it is widely used in Modern Chinese criticism of fine art, literature, music and poetry and is even used in relation to political idealism. [1]

Since the Chinese are renowned as a nation at playing with words, Romanticism is not such a foreign word for Chinese intellectuals, but an assimilated exotic term. [2] However, the implications of the term are slightly broadened in the Chinese mind, since it usually refers to artistic creation showing free and positive imagination rather than negative sentimental feelings or an out-pouring of troubles. It involves an expression of the innermost feelings of individuals, and as a result of touching on universal beauty. It also aims to demonstrate the general meaning of life (personal life included), such as the fate and tragedy of a nation, the prospects of a country, the ideals of certain way of living, the deep love of Mountain and Water etc.. [3]

7.2 ON ROMANTICISM

Generally, any kind of art must surely be based on the expression of human sense and artistic forms. An artist must deliberately select or

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- 1 Mao Zedong once advocated his aesthetic ideal as 'TO COMBINE REVOLUTIONARY REALISM WITH ROMANTICISM' which has been seen as the leading aesthetic idea for almost half of the century in China.
 - 2 The literary treasure of the poem, originating in the Tang Dynasty (618-709) and fully developed in the Song Dynasty (960-1279) is the remarkable evidence which shows the expertise of the Chinese intellectuals in use the words with strict tonal patterns, rhyme and rhythm schemes in fixed numbers of line and subtle meanings and feelings
 - 3 See Chapter 6 On Shan Shui, the masters of Yuan and Qing are typical.



reject forms from his factual observation and express feelings, emotions or ideas. But the artistic style which artists follow vary from time to time, and from place to place. We can define artistic approaches in three main categories. The first is a very basic one: the Realistic approach which emphasizes observation, the record of what is seen by the beholder; the second is the Idealistic approach which can be seen as philosophical, since rational thinking is crucial when trying to depict any idea through art; the third is the subjective expressive trend, whose path of creation is from the inside to the outside, although experience is still the vehicle to convey feelings. It is clearly unwise and almost impossible to practice and criticize art by taking a single extreme stance, since any art may at the same time be expressive, ideal and have a tangible image as well. We can only take the above categories as a starting point for research into art and artists.

According to 'The Oxford Companion To Art' (1970): "the word Romanticism derives from the Romances of the Middle Ages, that is to say the stories and legends invented in the languages deriving from Latin, and it suggests what is imaginative and ideal after the pattern of chivalry. The term Romanticism emerged in the language of art criticism during the eighteenth century, and developed its full implications very gradually."

As a kind of mode of ideal, the Romantic idea is far from routine. Concepts such as superiority, grandeur, and nobility are expressed in a poetic manner or fantasy which meets the needs of imaginative minds with high aesthetic enjoyment and a little sense of escapism. Even so, it is still difficult to identify Romanticism precisely, since the Romantic style falls between the idealism and expressionism; it is a combination of reason and feeling or philosophy and emotion. Interestingly, it is because of these difficulties of criticism and the ambiguous attributes of Romanticism, that art of this kind becomes greatly attractive and evokes deep thoughts thinking about its meaning and value.



As said above, to depict any ideal as the starting point is to find a realistic vision, and then to modify or refine it. According to Reynolds' classic definition, "there are excellences in the art of painting beyond what is commonly called the imitation of nature ... All the arts receive perfection from an ideal beauty, superior to what is to be found in individual nature." [4] Thus, Idealism can be understood as an artistic style in search of a perfection beyond the original world. Unfortunately the world we experience is definitely not perfect, and our ideal is forever conditioned by our limited experiences; thus, the perfect quality of any ideal is doubtful. Also our expressions of inner feelings are confined by our narrow personal scope arising from differences of tradition, natural environment, and social circumstance, etc. Therefore, it is difficult to be satisfied by a pure depiction of ideal or inner feelings. Obviously a compromise between ideal and feeling is occasionally needed for the artists who have to face real life and must find an effective and acceptable approach to painting which fits the gap between the ideal and reality. This is the reason why landscape art can be romantic, and connects profound thoughts with down-to-earth experiences.

Moreover, the process of experiencing and knowing has its logical linkage to the past, present and future, i.e. it has its own historical continuation. Therefore, we should also understand that although Romantic art tends to be anti-classical, there is still a link with the classical artistic basis which never cuts off from tradition. In this sense, the art of the Romantics is not a complete "rebellion" against classical or ideal art, but a variation (or distortion) of the tradition, since the Romantics only disagree with art which has no relation to real experiences.

It is also important to understand that the emotions depicted by the Romantics relate to a wide range of human experiences, such as being aware of natural power, national destiny, human fate, love, fear, etc.. The

4 Herbert Read: *The Meaning of Art*, p.223.



experiences which are the source of these feelings and emotions are conditioned by social life, natural conditions and personal experiences and reason, even the influences from certain kinds of education. In other words, romantic expression represents individuals but is also more than that: the art of the Romantics often involves certain universal qualities. That is why Romanticism can be found everywhere, in every type of art such as literature, fine art (in particular landscape painting) and landscape design. In this broad sense, Romanticism is completely 'international', since we can even find some trace in a country like China. Some factual records of Chinese artistic ideas can be easily translated by using the approximate term of Romanticism.

7.3

THE QUALITY OF ROMANTIC ART

On the quality of Romantic art, there is another difficulty facing us: to distinguish the Romanticism from Expressionism, since both of them claim to be an expression of subjective feelings, involving strong emotions. The key here is that the Expressionists show their individuality in a one-way sense only, developing their artistic images inwardly. Although we can use the word "expression" to define certain kinds of art, if we go too far in pursuing self-expression, we may fall into an 'ism' in which the sense of sharing will be very weak, and the images of painting will be very exaggerated or extremely distorted, causing difficulties of communication with others or with reality.

Based on their own broad experience, the artistic ideas of romantics can be developed both inward and outward. Unlike Expressionists whose way of thinking is inward and may cut off their links with the outside world and past, the Romantics thinking is a two-way



process; the effects of real life must be considered; and the environment or landscapes, as a 'container' of human feelings must be respected. Romantic art goes between idealism and pure self-expression, it can be very expressive, yet not necessarily as 'expression + ism' intrinsically. To avoid falling into the extremes of expression, Romantic artists place themes in the real world, appreciate the changes of nature (particularly the relationship between natural force and human life). Thus, their art is usually **readable**, in which the narrow personal world seems less important than the sense of being part of a wider human group, coping with nature, and possessing a sense of locality or place, nationality, Gods or beliefs, social conventions and responsibilities. That is why the river, lake, sea and mountain, rock and climate are common themes of these painters who, all around the world, "tell" us almost the same story about man and his place with varying Romantic accents.

It seems that Romantic art was born to have a strong relationship to nature. The themes in Romantic art such as horror, sadness, loneliness, passion are usually expressed by symbolic images such as storms or sunset, or the bleakness of mountains, the infinity of water or clouds, etc. We easily understand this artistic language and it is also easy to have sympathy with it.

Since the expressions are universal and relate to what we have experienced, Romantic art can express and reveal basic attitudes towards reality, can explain the world and life, can show concern for human welfare and desires, to achieve a psychological balance both for the artist and audience. In this sense, the art of the Romantics relates to **philosophy**, depicting our world-outlook with imaginative visual language.

In the minds of the Romantics, real life is never abandoned, although the features of the art may include fantasy. Thus, through an innocent manner of representation, the natural forces, the ruins, the



tragedies are mostly shown in an enchanting way through which the artists try to evoke associations with beauty rather than with “ugliness”, although some images look horrible, breathtaking or extremely tranquil. In fact, the Romantics were shown to be sentimental: not the reformers of the world, but the speakers of human feelings and desires. Based on the common sense of life, this art is one of the most acceptable on earth. In terms of the experience of natural forces and beauty, there is no boundary between nations, countries, races, although the techniques and media of depiction of those artists are so very much different.

According to William Vaughan (1988) [5], Romanticism can be identified by stylistic as well as artistic tendencies which involve artists in an ambivalent relationship with the political and social upheavals of the time. The basic principle of this art is to promote an intense expression of emotions and a sense of specific time and space. There is no single artistic style or mode to unify the features of this art, which has varies from painter to painter, from time to time, from place to place, from nation to nation. Despite this, however, we can also clearly see similar principles applied by Romantics to develop their art by identifying this diverse artistic style with essential Romantic aesthetic categories of landscape painting, in particular, the Sublime and the Picturesqu  in England, the Yi in China. This will provide the direction of the further discussion.

7.4 LANDSCAPE: AN ART WITH A ROMANTIC ACCENT

Not all kinds of art can communicate with nature efficiently. When art is confined to a purely personal level, almost nothing in it can be

5. William Vaughan: *Romantic Art*, Thames and Hudson, London 1988.



shared in common; for example, where there is a lack of a logical framework, a grammatical language for exchanging the ideas, but only an extreme, a pure personal 'creation'. Art like this can be either a great work or even rubbish. However, the paintings of landscape are different in that they must depict certain kinds of scenery, whether concrete or abstract; they must be images about places.

The various phases of landscape painting relate to changing social, geographical and climatic conditions and psychological responses to them. Thus, any account of the painting must relate to all the natural and social aspects which also touch our own aesthetic experience of appreciating the results.

In the West, Virgil's poetry inspired the ideal landscape of 17th century Italy (after a 1500 years gap); in the Jing Dynasty (317-420), Tao Yuanming [6] initiated the aesthetic principle: "The feeling of poet equals the idea of painting." Although the ideas of those landscape paintings were similar, the pictorial outcome is very different. A strong sense of locality characterizes the paintings and painters, separating the landscape of the West from that of the East. From this point of view, we call the Frenchmen Claude and Poussin "Italian" painters, the Russian born painter Cozen [7] the "English" watercolourist, and we agree with Dong Qichan's view of the Northern versus the Southern School in Shan Shui art.

If philosophy is the art for thinkers and music is for lovers, landscape is the art for both thinkers and lovers. Once landscape painting became an independent kind of art, that love and those thoughts were embodied in the emotion and feeling of landscape painters. It may be pastoral such as Claude's landscape in Italy and the Dong-Ju style in the early Northern Song Dynasty; it may be sublime such as Jinghau's

6 A widely regarded Chinese poet in Jing Dynasty.

7 Alexander Cozen (c. 1710-86), born in Russia, studied painting in Italy, developed water colour in England.



mountains or Rosa's scenery; [8] it may be as dramatic as the 'Mountains in Rain' by Mifu or the disturbed ocean by Turner. However, revealing the innermost feelings of these artists is based on an honest observation and rational analysis, in which landscape art has its realistic foundation and its own pictorial device. Even the so-called images of fantasy are located in certain places painters have experienced. From Altdorfer and Grünewald to Bosch and El Greco, no painter can be totally abstract, even though the images of these painters are unique and rarely seen.

Landscape paintings do tell us the features of places, but the deeper messages inside these art works are the ideas which influence the way people see, paint, and design. The design sense here is more important than the simple pictorial depiction, since it will cause changes in our living environment. Thus, landscape painting is not simply a picture about scenery but something which relates to our attitude to life, based on real down-to-earth experiences and inevitably linking art to philosophical issues. A landscape painter is, therefore, an artist not only of light and form, but of the place and its soul. Meanwhile, because of these special romantic qualities, the aesthetic ideas revealed in landscape painting have had a tremendous influence on the philosophy of landscape design both in the West and the East. We should remember that it was Mifu in the Song Dynasty who had already promoted the appreciation of the raw natural material of stone in the Chinese garden; Wen Zhenming in the Ming Dynasty who enthusiastically designed the garden in Suzhou. Similarly the art of Poussin and Claude enlightened the ideas of the English School

8 Salvador Rosa (1615-1673) Italian painter. His early pictures were influenced by Claude and Poussin, then developed his own pictorial language, depicting the so-called sublime phase and wildness of natural landscape. He had certain influences on the English School, particularly the development of the style of 'Picturesque'.



of landscape design, and Rosa provided an important reference for the English Picturesque movement in the 18th century. [9]

9 Also see Part 3: 'Tao in Landscape' and Part 4: 'On the English School'.