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LOOKING AT CHINESE LANDSCAPE PAINTING

TRADITIONS OF SPATIAL REPRESENTATION

LOOKING FOR PERSPECTIVE

When faced with a Chinese painting dating, for example, from the 14th Century an art historian from a western academic background may note that it does not feature perspective in the construction of pictorial space. What might the sources be behind the ease in observation that associates the experience of spatial dimensions on a flat surface with perspective? Since the Renaissance, perspectival construction of space has had a central part in the depiction of three-dimensionality in the west. As a concept, "perspective" is used mainly in two senses:

> generally, for any systematic technique that renders the illusion of recession behind a two-dimensional surface (including receding lines, gradients of colour, tone and texture, degrees of clarity etc.); but also more specifically, for the geometrical technique of linear perspective, the modern form of which was invented in the early Renaissance.[1]

In time, linear perspective came to be considered a kind of a standard, an ideal way for the depiction of space, though it was clear that in the history of painting this kind of perspective-construction only existed in very rare cases in its "pure" form. Nevertheless, that ideal has been very persistent in the minds of viewers since the Renaissance.

It seems that this mode of seeing has become habitual to such an extent, that for a western viewer a picture in a form of a rectangle implicitly includes a reference to a window, to something that is outside one's own presence. After all, it has been quite common in art historical texts to treat a view in a painting as if one was looking at a view from a window, as noted by Svetlana Alpers:

> In our time art historians have developed the terminology and trained their eyes and sensibilities to react rather to those stylistic features that compose the art – the height of the horizon on the panel, the placing of tree or cow, the light. All of these are spoken of as aspects of art as much if not more than they are as observations of the world seen.[2]

The focus of this essay is on pictorial representation and on the problem of representa-

tion of spatial dimensions in particular.[3] I will first consider questions such as what visual perception is in general, how space is perceived, and what is special about the perception of pictures. This last point raises the question: "What is pictorial space?" When looking into the writings of perceptual psychologists, for example, one is immediately surprised by the lack of agreement on the questions of both visual and pictorial perception. The second part contains specific examples of analyses by different scholars of Chinese landscape painting; these analyses will then be compared.

The study of the history of Chinese painting in the European and North American academic worlds spans approximately one hundred years. The methodological models were sought from the study of European art history. At the turn of this Century, then, the problem was that art historians interested in Chinese art did not have knowledge of the language, and vice versa, Sinologists, who were able to read the original sources were not trained to analyse paintings. Even when those two abilities coincided, the materials for first hand study were not easily accessible. This situation applied both to the availability of paintings and to theoretical texts. The evaluation of aesthetic value was more often based on reproductions than on original works of art.

The first serious studies were published by Sinologists who translated Chinese texts on art. The Chinese have a long tradition of writings on art; including biographies, catalogues of paintings, and art theoretical essays. Herbert Giles' work *An Introduction to the History of Chinese Pictorial Art* (1905) consists of his translations in chronological order of some of these kinds of texts.

The Japanese had collected Chinese art for centuries, so that during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Japan offered better access to Chinese artworks than China itself, which was not as open for foreigners as Japan. The American Ernest Fenollosa (1853-1908) and the Japanese Kakuzo Okakura (1862-1913) were both important in the spreading of East Asian aesthetic ideas to a western audience. Okakura's *Book of Tea* (1906) soon became a classic, and has since been translated into several languages.

Studies devoted to Chinese painting included Raphael Petrucci's (1872-1917) *Les Peintres Chinois*, (1913), Arthur Waley's (–) *An Introduction to the Study of Chinese Painting* (1923), and Otto Fischer's (1886-1948) *Chinesische Landschaftsmalerei* (1923). At that time the material accessible for the scholar seemed quite homogeneous, but after the early decades research material expanded both temporally and geographically. In the introduction to his work Giles mentions that the art histories of his time, that is, at the turn of the Century, devoted only a few sentences to art outside of Europe. A glance at *The Dictionary of Art* (1996) proves that the situation has changed: 480 pages are devoted to the art of China, and individual artists or schools of painting have their own entries.

SURFACE AND PICTORIAL SPACE

Seeing, and the theories of what it is, have their own history. Euclid's *Optica* (ca. 300 BC) was the first to present a model for the perception of the environment. Johannes Kepler (1571-1630), René Descartes (1623-1662), George Berkeley (1685-1753) and Hermann von Helmholz (1821-1894) have been among the most notable philosophers and scientists in the history of these theories.

In the study of perception a starting-point has been that photograph-like pictures are formed on the surface of the retina and from the retina a series of these pictures are transmitted

to the brain. This idea was discovered by Kepler, who compared the surface of the retina to a canvas, and it has persisted to this Century.[4] Another basic assumption has been that visual perception is simplest when the head is immobile like a fixed camera. This so-called camera-analogy was popular in the description of the perceptual process in classical optics:

> It leads to one of the most seductive fallacies in the history of psychology – that the retinal image is something to be seen. I call this the "little man in the brain" theory of the retinal image, which conceives the eye as a camera at the end of the nerve cable that transmits the image to the brain. Then there has to be a little man, a homunculus, seated in the brain who looks at this physiological image. – We are in fact worse off than before, since we are confronted with the paradox of an infinite series of little men, each within the other and each looking at the brain of the next bigger man.[5]

In addition to this, it is useful to look into the research done on imagery: the structure of mental images and how mental images and memory are connected. It appears that imagery research is a tradition with a long history, starting with Aristotle (384-322 BC). Yet, in its present state the field is relatively new. Before the First World War imagery research had come to a dead-end as the main method used in examining mental images was introspection. It was also discovered that some thoughts were not accompanied by mental images. At the same time behaviourism was gaining ground which led to a situation where until the early 1960's research on imagery was largely ignored. Behaviourism maintained that mental events were not a proper subject matter of psychology. But it has become clear, on one hand, that behaviourism could not provide adequate explanations of perception, language acquisition, and the like.[6]

On the other hand, conceptual innovations have taken place in linguistics and artificial intelligence. These have allowed us to approach anew the question whether our thoughts are imageless or not. One of the main authorities in the field who supports the notion of images is Stephen Kosslyn, and I have relied on his studies as his main concern is the structure of visual images. One of the conclusions he has drawn from his research, and which is relevant here, is that mental images may be pictorial but not photograph-like.[7]

The present-day view of how the sense of sight functions in general terms involves four aspects: first, retinal images are not photograph-like; second, eyesight is selective and the patterns in seeing are generally repeatable; third, seeing is intentional and it can also be functional, especially with regard to searching for meanings; and fourth, attentiveness conditions what we see, and it can be directed by advice. In addition to these four points two results from experimental psychology throw light on the complexities involved in the process of seeing: our expectations and intentions influence what we see, and the capacity for visual observation can be increased with experience.[8] A certain amount of subjectivity with regard to the interpretation of pictures is then unavoidable.

If the above is a general description of how sense of sight functions, what about the perception of space? James Gibson argues that space, in general, is a myth. This is also the point of departure for the well-known phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), who strongly criticised Descartes' notion that space existed independently and homogeneously.[9] Both Gibson and Merleau-Ponty conclude that when we make observations of our environment instead of space, we see the things and objects around us. This is summed up by

Gibson in the following:

> Geometrical space is a pure abstraction. Outer space can be visualized but cannot be seen. The cues for depth refer only to paintings, nothing more. The visual third dimension is a misapplication of Descartes's notion of three axes for a coordinate system.[10]

For the individual, the sense of space arises through the movement of our body among the objects around us.

The field of study on the perception of pictures is relatively new. Authorities are few and come from different backgrounds, as Margaret Hagen points out when discussing the state of the field in her article "A New Theory of the Psychology of Representational Art." According to her, the main authorities in the field are Rudolph Arnheim, Ernst Gombrich, and James Gibson. She calls Gombrich's theory "constructivist," Arnheim's "Gestalt theory," and Gibson's theory "perspectivist," and locates her own position as perspectivist.[11]

Gibson defines a picture as "a surface so treated as to make available an arrested optic array, of limited scope, with information about other things than the surface itself."[12] The content of the picture, then, originates from the environment surrounding the maker, but without a direct, one-to-one correspondence with it. Gibson wishes to emphasize that pictorial depth perception is only one special case of perception. In a way, it is a very exceptional case, because pictorial perception is not necessary for everyday life.

Gombrich has also been labelled "perceptualist." In this tradition, Norman Bryson takes Ruskin's *Modern Painters* (1843) to be the first perceptualist account of art and Gombrich's *Art and Illusion* as the fullest statement in that tradition of art historical discourse. In the perceptualist tradition the principal starting point for analysis is that a painting is the mimesis of perception, modified by a schema.[13] The artist is seen as working with similar methods as the scientist: first, he is confronted with an initial problem, for example how to depict three-dimensionality on a flat surface; he then finds a solution to that problem; and finally, he compares his solution to other earlier solutions.

Arnheim is a Gestalt psychologist and the basic components of his perceptual theory are Gestalt principles and the visual concept. According to him, pictures "do their work by grasping and rendering some relevant qualities – shape, color, movement – of the objects or activities they depict."[14] It is important to remember that the picture is not a mere copy of what it represents but an interpretation which can function on the most varied levels of abstraction.

Which factors allow us to see the appearance of three-dimensionality on a two-dimensional surface? The perception of surface occurs first and the specific markings on the surface are only perceived afterwards. I would like to emphasize the point made by Arnheim that while the surface and its texture are perceived, the markings which may depict human beings, objects and places are not actually perceived. Pictures are comprehended non-perceptually.[15] Arnheim prefers to call visual perception "visual thinking" and one of his basic starting points is that perception and thinking are closely intertwined.[16]

A picture may contain information which refers to depth at the same time as it is clear that the surface is flat. We may assume that the impression of three-dimensionality will arise if the so-called depth-cues are strong enough, and if the depth-cues in a picture have their origin in our environment. The most powerful of these cues are outline perspective, interposition, and adjacency. Shadowing and aerial perspective

are among the least pervasive cues.[17]

Haber relies on studies on the development of the senses of children which show that young children apply the habits learned in the perception of the environment to looking at pictures. Their ability to perceive surface qualities comes later.[18] On the other hand, Gibson, as quoted earlier, argues that "the cues for depth refer only to paintings, nothing more." On the basis of these studies in psychology, it seems evident that understanding the character and "system" behind the eye, the most important tool of the art historian, is no simple task.

READING DESCRIPTIONS OF PAINTINGS

In the first millennium in Chinese art history we encounter the problem that few paintings have secure attributions. Original landscape paintings are scarce and as a consequence we must also study Chinese texts on painting. These texts tell us about masters like Wang Wei (701-761), who specialized in landscape painting, but whose work as a landscape painter is transmitted to us only through later copies and written descriptions. Interpretation of these texts, when visual reference material is rare, is not straightforward. On the other hand, knowledge of Chinese views on their own art has affected our perception of Chinese paintings.

A useful introduction to Chinese writers' views on visual arts in translation is provided by the anthology *Early Chinese Texts on Painting* edited by Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih (1985). One has to keep in mind that the same issues which artists and scholars in the western world deem to be important are not necessarily discussed by the Chinese; however, that does not mean it was not a concern of painters. Some isssues are taken for granted and are not therefore thought worthy of discussion, whereas other issues may well be discussed intensively and repeatedly over the centuries. Bush and Shih note this aptly in their introduction to the anthology:

> Even if the visual evidence for Chinese painting from the fourth through ninth centuries indicates increasing command of devices for conveying optical perceptions – would texts of the period necessarily be confined to the discussion of representation or illustration?[19]

But how is "realistic form," and "truth to nature" to be understood in the Chinese context? In this respect it is intriguing to attempt to visualize Gu Kaizhi's advice for painting landscapes from a text attributed to him entitled"How to Paint Mt. Yuntai" (*Hua Yuntaishan ji*).[20] The very first sentence in the opening paragraph (*shan you mian, ze beixiang you ying*) of this text illustrates the problems:

1. The mountain has a main face, hence its back is shadowed.[21]
2. The mountain has a principle face, and its back is in shadow.[22]
3. The mountain has its face, then the back is its shadow (reflection).[23]
4. When a mountain has (different) faces, front and back will be (distinguished by) shadows.[24]
5. La montagne présente des faces, et il y a donc des formes qui en se répondant créent des nouvelles formes.[25]
6. Since a mountain (must) have (different) faces then there will be (differences in) shadow between the background and foreground.[26]

At first the sentence seems simple enough, but after a closer look a question emerges: how are we to understand "face" and "back" in this

context? Kiyohiko Munakata cites in her references the translation by Michael Sullivan and notes later that "the first sentence is often taken as stating a principle of naturalistic representation of the mountain, taking literally the terms 'face' and 'back' as the front and back in a three-dimensional composition." But according to her, the likely source for the terms "face" and "back" can be found in Chinese geomancy (*fengshui*). She quotes a Ming dynasty scholar of geomancy, Miao Xiyong, who has designated as the "face" that side of the mountain which is smooth, bright and moist, whereas the "back" side is coarse, dark and dry.[27]

Hubert Delahaye disposes altogether with this front-back dichotomy. In his opinion, it is unlikely that *ying* in this context refers to "shadow". Instead, it should be translated as "image": there is a dynamic equilibrium among the elements of landscape.[28]

Two other texts relevant to the discussion on verisimilitude and pictorial representation are Zong Bing's (375-443) "A Preface to the Painting of Mountains and Rivers" (*Hua shanshui xu*) and Xie He's (active ca. 500-535?) "Classification of Painters" (*Gu huapinlu*) containing the "Six Laws" (*Liu fa*) of painting.[29]

The meaning of *lei* in Zong Bing's text is central to my analysis. Bush has translated a pivotal passage:

> That is why those who look at paintings are only troubled by awkwardness in the likeness and do not consider that diminution detracts from verisimilitude.– If response by the eye and accord by the mind (to nature) is considered a universal law, when similitude is skillfully achieved, eyes will also respond completely and the mind be entirely in accord.[30]

In the first sentence *lei* is translated as "likeness," in the second as "similitude".[31] This manner of connecting *lei* with likeness has been criticized by Munakata, who translates *lei* as "essential nature" in the context of Zong Bing's text, where it refers "to the essential nature shared by objects of the same kind; thus, *lei* of the sacred mountains is their sacred quality."[32]

Xie He's "Six Laws" have been much discussed:

> First, Spirit Resonance which means vitality; second, Bone Method which is (a way of) using the brush; third, Correspondence to the Object which means the depicting of forms; fourth, Suitability to type which has to do with the laying of colors; fifth, Division and Planning, that is, placing and arrangement; and sixth, Transmission by copying, that is to say the copying of models.[33]

Most attention has been concentrated on the "First Law" and the meaning of the concept "spirit resonance" (*qiyun*).

The "Third Law", or "Correspondence to the Object which means the depicting of forms" (*Yingwu xiangxing*) is significant from the point of view of pictorial representation. William Cohn, for example, discussed the first two laws at length and summed up the content of the others:

> The last four canons are not much more than statements of the obvious, and could just as well apply to western painting, viz. realistic form, right colour, good composition and the study of good models.[34]

In those translations which I have compared it is acknowledged that the depiction of forms should conform with the objects being represented.[35] But whether one should, indeed, speak of realism in the western sense, has been

doubted by Sirén, who emphasizes the inclusion of the spirit of the object in its representation.[36] Obviously, the "Third Law" can only be understood in relation to the first two.

These three examples from Chinese sources and their interpretations indicate that the understanding of a text necessarily requires knowledge of related visual material. For actual paintings of the first millennium we have to turn to archaeological finds or paintings on artefacts. The usual Tang period examples come from the Shosoin, in Nara, Japan, where plectrum guards of *biwas* with painted landscape decorations can be found. Another major source are painted murals and silk paintings from Dunhuang.

Few remarks in Chinese critical literature on art are concerned with the representation of spatial dimensions. The expression *yuanjin* (or *jinyuan*) which can be translated as "far-near" has been taken to mean perspective.[37] Francois Cheng and Roger Goepper, on the other hand, see *yuanjin* as the attempt to balance contrasts in painting.[38]

Guo Xi's views on landscape painting, preserved in a text entitled "The Lofty Message of Forests and Streams" (*Linquan gaozhi ji*), are central to this context. In the text, which was compiled by his son Guo Si (active ca. 1070-after 1123), Guo Xi presents his definition of the *san yuan* of mountains. *San yuan* is usually translated as "three distances":

> Mountains have three types of distance. Looking up to the mountain's peak from its foot is called the high distance. From in front of the mountain looking past it to beyond is called deep distancce. Looking from a nearby mountain at those more distant is called the level distance.[39]

Stanley Murashige has noted that some scholars take this to mean that there are three possible compositional schemes and a painter could choose between them.This interpretation is not explicit in Guo Xi's text and his painting "Early Spring" seems to include all these distances.[40] Another point of view is offered by Hay, who has translated *yuan* as "extension", because *san yuan* does not so much refer to measured distance, but rather to the notion of "extended perception."[41]

The *san yuan* surface again in Chinese critical literature on art in Han Zhuo's (act. ca. 1095-ca. 1125) "Compilation on Landscape" (*Shanshui chunquan*) version, and in Huang Gongwang's (1269-1354) "Secrets of Describing Landscape" (*Xie shanshui jue*) both variations of Guo Xi's formulation. In these later texts, a major change with respect to Guo Xi is the replacement of "deep distance" with "broad distance."[42] In addition to "broad distance," Han Zhuo's other terms are translated as "shrouded distance" and "mysterious distance," which emphasize the atmospheric qualities of landscape.[43] However, these various distances may be incorporated into one landscape painting, because, following the words of Murashige, "the mountain lives as a temporal experience rather than as an object in space."[44]

LOOKING AT REPRESENTATIONS OF LANDSCAPE

Landscape painting is easily understood as a representation of an actual scene, as a view opening out from a window. The viewer takes it for granted that a similar scene exists in reality and experiences a landscape painting as a natural rather than as an artificial construction. But a picture is always artificial, the result of a process of abstraction taking place in the artist's mind. The laws of geometry may be dominant in the resulting picture or it may be constructed on a totally different basis.

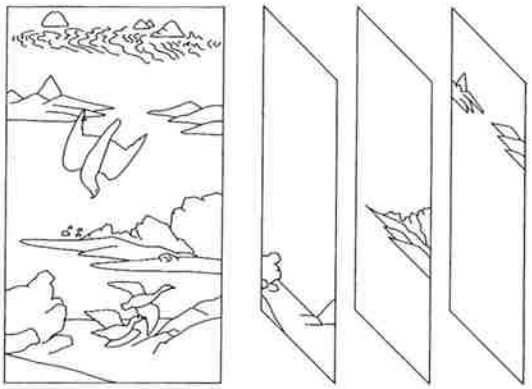
In one of his manuscripts preserved in the "Sirén-arkivet" in the Museum of Far Eastern Art in Stockholm, titled "A New Approach to Chinese Painting", Wilfrid Wells proposed that viewers of Chinese painting should reverse their viewing habits learned from European painting:

> If the higher hill is not added behind the lower, but the lower hill is pasted to the base of the higher, the picture does not recede into the distance like European painting, but emerges from it; and the ground surfaces are not turned up towards the back to show themselves clearly, but turned down towards the front for this purpose; the zig-zags do not lead our eyes into the distance, they lead our eyes out of it. The whole conception is in fact fundamentally different. The Chinese artist drew the landscape to him; he did not push it away. His perspective did not rise; it fell.[45]

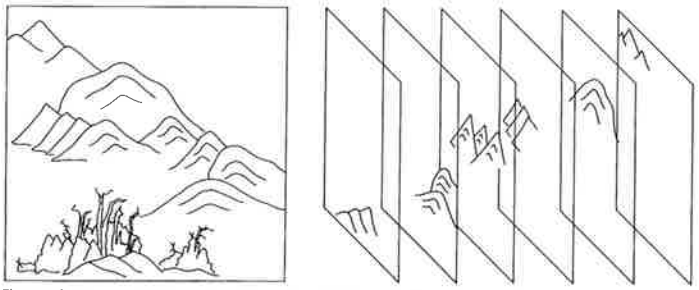
Wells's views sound "radical," but they had no serious impact as they were not published, except to the extent that Sirén adopted them. But even though Sirén wrote along lines which followed Wells's ideas, he did not do so in a consistent fashion, perhaps because he did not quite fully understand the meaning of those ideas.

Nonetheless, Wells challenged the then prevalent views about the structure of Chinese painting. It is as if he wanted to be provocative, to shake the foundations of the reigning status quo described by William Dunning:

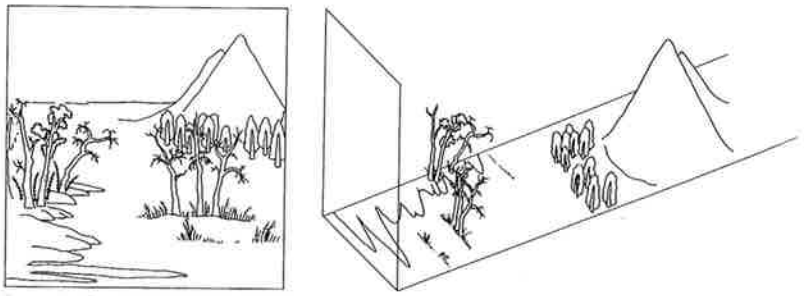
> There are two widespread and erroneous beliefs about space in European painting: that "perspectival space is objectively superior to other systems of spatial representations and marks an irreversible advance" and that "'Quattrocento' space reigns unchallenged from Giotto until Cezanne."[46]



Figs. 13a, b. Diagrams of *Hawk and Ducks*, fig. 18, showing additive mountain motifs receding in three separate stages



Figs. 14a, b. Diagrams of Li-sheng, *Dream Journey through the Hsiao and Hsiang Rivers*, fig. 53, showing overlapping mountain motifs receding in a continuous sequence



Figs. 15a, b. Diagrams of Chao Meng-fu, *Autumn Colors on the Ch'iao and Hua Mountains*, fig. 66, showing landscape elements arranged along a continuously receding ground plane

Fig. 1. Diagrams by Wen Fong, from *Images of the Mind*. Princeton, 1984, 21.

In *Images of the Mind* (1984) (Fig. 1) Wen Fong attempted to analyse various stages featured in the representation of landscape in Chinese painting with the help of three diagrams illustrating the different stages in this process. The continuously receding ground plane is, for Fong, the feature which ties the composition together and without which one

Fig. 2. "Hawk and Ducks", painting on the plectrum guard of a *biwa*. Shosoin, Nara, Japan.

cannot speak of the illusion as complete. In the diagrams the matter seems simple enough. But when one turns from these schematic drawings to the actual paintings the problems in observing and describing the ground plane in a mountainous landscape become obvious.

In the first diagram the pictures which belong to the first stage, temporally situated between ca. 700 AD and ca. 1050 AD, are described as showing a tri-partite spatial structure in composition. Here the treatment of space is compartmentalized so that the three sections – foreground, middle ground, and far distance – all occupy their own separate levels on the picture plane and each has its own angle of recession.[47]

Landscape painting evolved from ideographic mountain and tree motifs which were scattered on a two-dimensional surface.[48] The feeling of three-dimensionality was achieved step by step, and one of the first discoveries was that overlapping triangles (mountain motifs) could suggest a recession in depth.[49] The first diagram in his analysis illustrates the painting *Hawk and Ducks* preserved in the Shosoin and dated to the eighth Century (Fig. 2). It shows overlapping triangles as well as the way Fong sees the whole composition in terms of tri-partite division. One characteristic feature is that these additive images are not physically integrated.

A painting, one that is important in the Song painting canon, is Fan Kuan's (d. after 1023) "Travelers Amid Streams and Mountains" (Fig. 3). It presents a monumentally towering view of a mountain with a caravan making its way in the foreground. It belongs to the first phase in Fong's scheme. Landscape motifs are viewed frontally and put together to form an image of landscape on an additive basis. The viewer comprehends these images separately. The three different distances proceeding from front to back are distinguished from each other by blank intervals of space. Each of the distances is presented to the viewer from a different angle. The result is not a representation of any particular view of nature but, instead, we are confronted with a conceptual vision of the macrocosmic universe.[50]

The additive basis and the tri-partite structure of the composition have been identified by both Richard Barnhart and Robert Maeda. The blank intervals separating the different distances are referred to as horizontal channels by Barnhart, whereas Maeda describes them as lighter neutral areas. An impression is given of

a ground plane, of continuous recession. However, it remains only an impression: ambiguities in the depiction of forms and in the relationships between different points in the picture result in a situation where in reality the continuity of recession remains unachieved. The small differences in the tonal values of near and far also prevent the arousal of a sense of illusion of depth.[51]

Waikam Ho and Dawn Delbanco Ho have commented on the painting that even though Fan Kuan maintained the frontality of his mountain forms he "was the first to achieve spatial unity in his painting through the device of centrality."[52] The arrangement where this frontality dominated the landscape representation, could be seen as hindering the attempts at penetration into space, after painters became more interested in creating strong depth effects in their paintings.[53] Spatial unity and illusion of depth are not, however, the same thing.

John Hay's writings provide us with another angle on these analyses. In an article called "Some Questions Concerning Classicism in Relation to Chinese Art" (1988) he compared the painting by Fan Kuan (described above) to Guo Xi's "Early Spring" (Fig. 4) from the point of view of their spatial structure. Dated to 1072, this painting by Guo Xi belongs to Fong's second phase (ca. 1050-1250). Paintings executed during this phase show an attempt to match everything in modelling and composition with the natural vision. However, the spatial relationships are not thought to describe a real ground plane. Hay saw in the Fan Kuan painting a denial of geometrical stability:

The space between the middle-ground hill and the seemingly monolithic mountain cannot be measured; it is a highly compressed reservoir of *entropic space*, so full of energy that it lifts the mountain towards the heavens.[54]

Earlier in the same article Hay had contemplated the possibility of viewing the function of

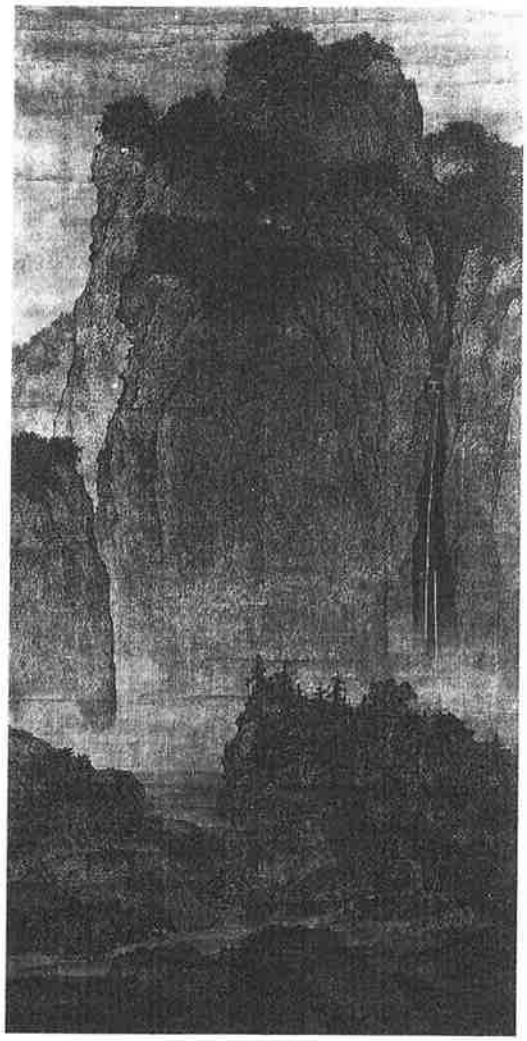


Fig. 3. Fan Kuan (d. after 1023), "Travelers Amid Streams and Mountains". Ink and colour on silk. National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan, Republic of China.

space in Chinese art in terms of algebraic space rather than geometrical space. What he writes is crucial:

> – a geometrical space conceived by points, lines, planes, and angles is fundamentally different from a space – which may perhaps be considered algebraic – in which nuclear relationships spread out through expanding equations, capable of generating systems of endless complexity in which the compressed potentiality at the core can still be identified at its outermost limits. Geometrical space, we might say, is projected; what I am calling algebraic space is

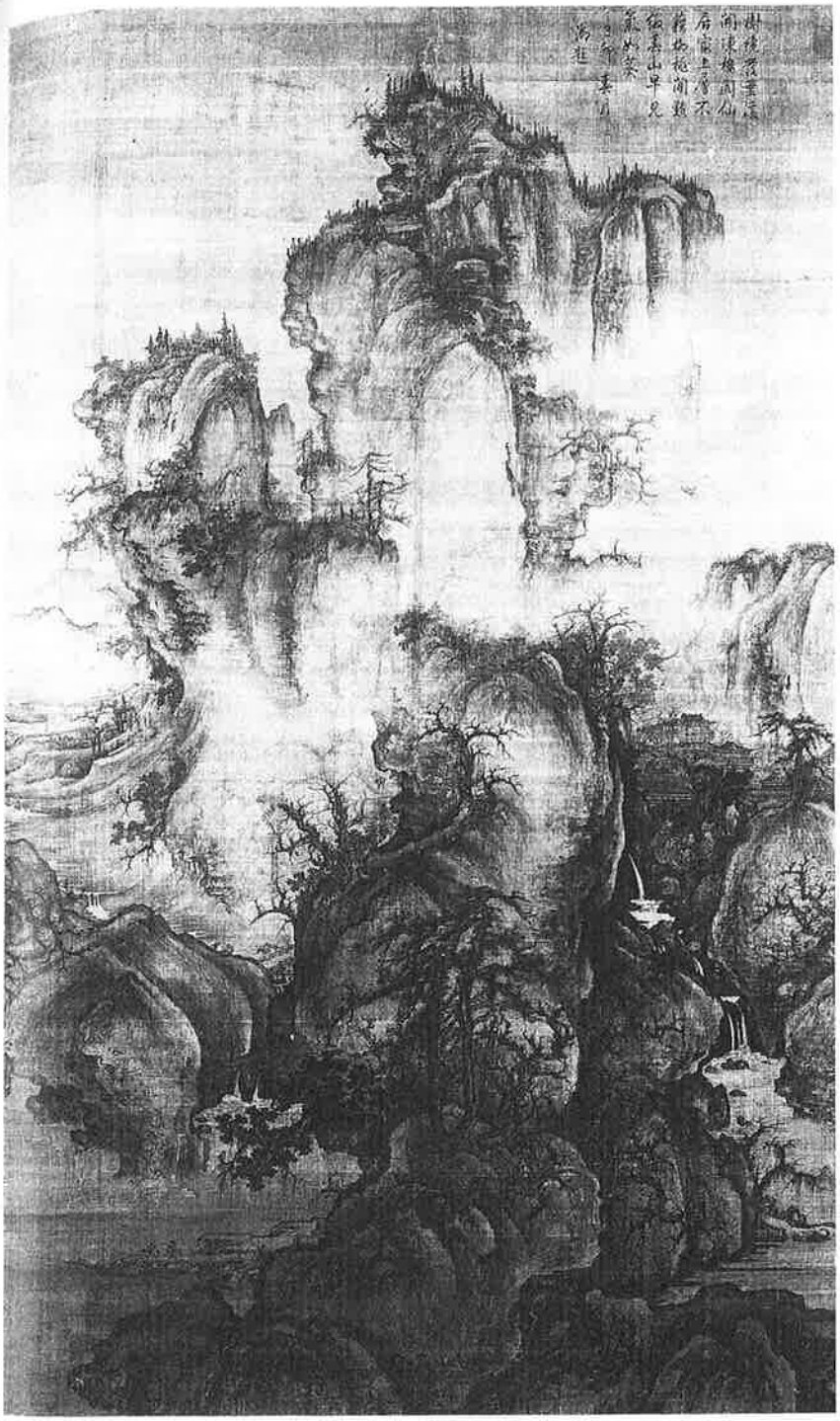


Fig. 4. Guo Xi (ca. 1000-ca. 1090), "Early Spring". Ink and colour on silk. National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan, Republic of China.

propagated. Distinctions of object and subject, the duality of mass and void, the systematic objectification of optical perspective, and the directional illumination of light from a single source all have to fight for existence within algebraic space, whereas geometrical space, optically delineated, entails a quite definite kind of hierarchy.[55]

The two "new" descriptions of space in Chinese painting, entropic space and algebraic space, take note of the characteristics of change, movement – *yin-yang* – dimensions of landscape in painting. These qualities of change and movement are strong in Guo Xi's painting.

"Early Spring" has been characterized by Fong as being a highly complex landscape. Again, as in Fan Kuan's "Travelers Amid Streams and Mountains", the artist is seen as striving to create a unified composition with deep and immeasurable space – yet the result remains the same and the painting is a composite of additive images.[56] The overall impression in "Early Spring" is fantasy-like or charged with emotion, even though Cahill finds in the indivisual scenes within this painting "a degree of realism beyond anything encountered earlier".[57]

This painting features a new kind of technique in creating the illusion of space and distance, namely atmospheric perspective. In this method objects which are presented as further away are depicted in progressively lighter tones. Hay has on one occasion written that mist as a medium in Chinese painting is comparable to the diagonal in its effect of creating continuity in a painting and that it contributes to the creation of space which is primarily visual.[58] The use of clouds and mist as depth-building elements has been thoroughly examined by Marianne Ebersold. According to her studies, the first examples of such uses for clouds and mist were found in Dunhuang, where clouds move in between mountain tops and create the feeling of depth. Mist, on the other hand, is used around the lower regions of mountains and function in the same way as clouds.[59]

Hay doubts the usefulness of a geometrical approach to the analysis of pictorial space in

Chinese painting. He draws attention to an older tradition in perceptual psychology which has encouraged us to see brushmarks on a surface in terms of "figure and ground". However, a more recent tradition prefers to replace the geometrical abstraction with a semiotic structure, which uses conceptual relationships as a basis for analysis instead.[60]

Hay connected this Guo Xi painting with the visual world as it was analyzed by Gibson in *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. There is a denial of the surface of the silk in the landscape painting of Northern Song period. The painter of that period followed his perception without constraints of an artificial construction such as optical perspective. Therefore the physical surface of these paintings is never revealed. Instead, we see what there is: mountains and valleys, trees and rocks. We do not see them in terms of brushmarks which have been applied on silk.[61] This is why space in Song painting has been described as being palpable, alive or believable.

For Fong, the continuously receding ground plane is the feature which ties the composition together and without which one cannot speak of the illusion of space as complete. In his diagram this spatially integrated, continuously receding ground plane was not achieved until ca. 1250-1400, which marks the temporal limits of the third phase.[62] However, to observe and describe a ground plane in a mountainous landscape is a different matter, if compared to a description of an interior.

Not all scholars have found Fong's presentation of these different phases convincing. This has become apparent in recent years, especially in two dissertations, one by Caron Smith on Fan Kuan and his tradition, and the other by Valerie Malenfer on the "Dream Journey on the Xiao and Xiang," a handscroll by an anonymous Southern Song painter. In both of them, the problem of observing the ground plane in a mountainous landscape is discussed. "Dream Journey on the Xiao and Xiang" is the painting of Fong's diagram and describes the second phase (Fig. 5). But according to Malenfer the painting already features a continuously receding ground plane:

Fig. 5. Anon. (12th Century), "Dream Journey on the Xiao and Xiang". Ink on paper. Tokyo National Museum, Japan.

> even though mountains are painted in successively layered, conceptually parallel planes, the water, which occupies half of the total surface of the scroll, works already as a convincing receding ground plane, more than a Century before Zhao Mengfu.[63]

In Fong's diagram hanging scrolls and handscrolls are analysed together. Are comparisons between different painting formats valid? Do the same principles of representation apply to them? Certainly, aesthetics can play an active role in the making of representational choices, as has been demonstrated by Hay. A certain format may encourage specific choices, though Hay does not see a hanging scroll and a handscroll to be as "far apart" from each other as a fan painting, because a fan painting remains an object, whereas the two other formats transcend their existence as objects.[64]

As noted above, observing the recession of the ground plane in a mountainous landscape is not as straightforward as it is with an interior or

Fig. 6. Guan Tong (act. ca. 907-923), "Travelers at the Mountain Pass". Ink and colour on silk. National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan, Republic of China.

a city scene. The sense of illusion is, in many cases, dominated by the idea of linear perspective. One starting point for a painter may well be to present the landscape as if it were viewed from a window. It is surprising to find that Fong in his recent writing compared the Fan Kuan "Travelers Amid Streams and Mountains" to an ink-drawing by Rembrandt. The example well illustrates what he means by a consistently receding ground plane. A totally different issue is whether this comparison is historically and culturally valid: could these pictures be used, for example, as a representative of "Chinese" or "western" types more generally?

Fong's diagram is an analysis of the paintings in terms of geometrical space. If we follow Hay, we should perhaps not to be as insistent as Fong is about the ground plane – these landscapes are not "windows to the world" – and start thinking instead in terms of movement and changing views and relationships. We certainly feel the ground under our feet as we move about, but when walking in hills or forests – in the landscape – the feeling is seldom of flatly continuous ground.

I am dwelling on this matter at length because Fong has used the three phases, as described with the aid of the diagram, as an aid in the attribution of paintings on the basis that paintings of different period styles should manifest different perceptions of space. One has to remember, though, that it is only one aspect which has to be examined when making attributions. In my investigation of Fong's writings on Chinese painting, I found one example of a change in the dating of a painting. A landscape which has traditionally been attributed to Guan Tong (act. ca. 907-923), "Travelers at the Mountain Pass" (Fig. 6) has been re-dated to ca. 1050, but this was the result of a closer look at the depiction of forms and the use of brushwork, not a matter of changes in spatial structure. Spatially the painting still belongs to the second phase.[65]

A section of Zhao Mengfu's handscroll "Autumn Colors on Qiao and Hua Mountains" (Fig. 7) is representative of the third phase in Fong. The painting is a handscroll, but a relatively short one. It has received a lot of attention, especially the structure of pictorial space,

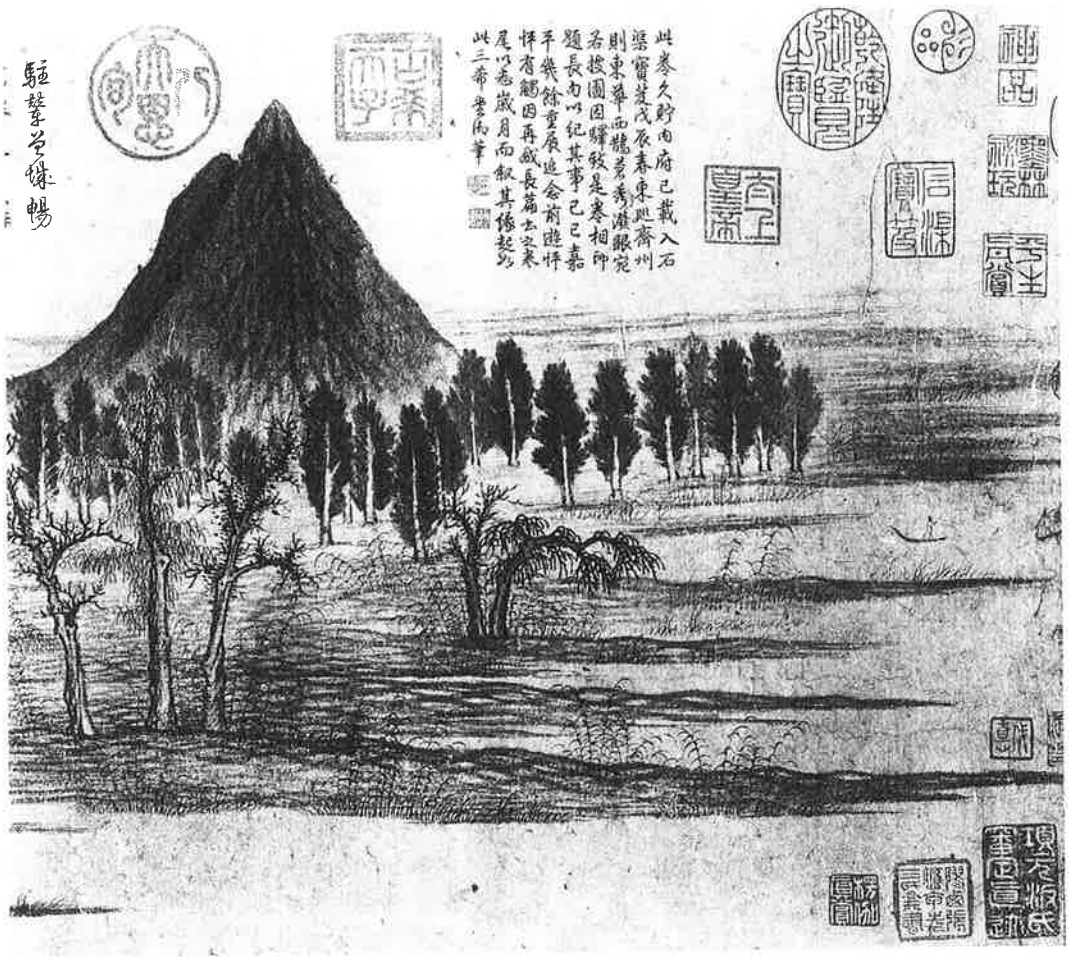


Fig. 7. Zhao Mengfu (1254-1322), "Autumn Colors on Qiao and Hua Mountains", detail. Ink and colour on paper. National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan, Republic of China.

since the publication of a monograph on it by Chu-tsing Li (1965). Until then, the scroll had passed quite unnoticed in the writings of the western art historians, even Sirén's remarks were astonishingly laconic:

> The historical fame of this picture, which is executed with light colours and ink in a somewhat dry manner, is hardly due to any extraordinary pictorial qualities or beauty – but seems rather based on the renown of the motif and the name and position of the artist.[66]

The image on this handscroll can be viewed easily in its entirety as the length of the picture section is 93.2 cm.[67] When reading the literature on "Autumn Colors on Qiao and Hua Mountains," one notices that writers talk about it as if it were completely spread open. However, the picture has usually been divided into three sections. A conical shaped mountain dominates the first section, the middle part has a tree group near the lower border, and in the last section one can see a mountain which looks like a loaf of bread.

Fong observed a consistently receding ground plane as a dominating compositional element in the picture:

> Every element in the composition relates closely to a consistently receding ground plane; the space appears to be physical and measurable.[68]

Cahill has, however, found inconsistencies in the depiction of space and in the relationships of the objects in the picture. In his view a real impression of spatial continuity is not conceived. He also maintains that Zhao Mengfu consciously chose a primitive mode of expression from a period when the problems related to a unified pictorial space were unsolved.[69]

Looking at paintings dated and attributed to Yuan dynasty painters we are confronted with pictures in which there is a play of contradictory elements. Consistency in spatial recession is a typical feature of Yuan painting, though at the same time the brushwork deviates from the descriptive function it had during the previous dynasties. In other words, there are elements which contribute to a creation of a certain kind of illusion in the painting, yet there are characteristics which work against this illusion. Hay has aptly described this feature of Zhao Mengfu in "Autumn Colors on Qiao and Hua Mountains": "He dances with his rushes and grasses across this surface and practically equates a level distance *p'ing-yuan* with the texture of his paper."[70]

ALTERING VIEWS IN A LANDSCAPE

If we accept the conventionality of representational systems and their integrality in the way the world is perceived, what consequences does this have for the art historian?

Possibly, the different types of spatial representation in Chinese painting cannot be described satisfactorily in Fong's manner. Recent studies on Chinese painting make evident the complexities involved. However, they also show that if the original context of a painting is investigated with rigour, the perception of paintings will be sharpened, not only with regard to pictorial space.

When can we say that the illusion of space is fully achieved? What are the basic requirements for this? A continuously receding ground plane clearly cannot be the sole characteristic in general, though it may be significant in some systems of representation. Spatial unity and illusion of depth are not identical.

To depict spatial dimensions in a painting or, rather, to make the viewer experience a sense of space, the painter has to construct a system of representation. However, it does not have to be a system based on geometry. Hay's writings, for example, suggest that the paradigm of Renaissance space "ended finally with Einstein's special theory of relativity."[71] Yet the persistence of the geometrical system illustrates the slowness of the change.

The concepts we use in analysing the paintings in the European/western tradition have special connotations. They do not necessarily have symmetrical correspondences with those employed by the Chinese. Moreover, language is a culturally contextualized phenomenon. Therefore finding adequate translations for Chinese concepts may be arduous. One solution, useful in certain contexts, is to leave the Chinese terms untranslated and, instead, explain their meaning – just as in Italian painting *chiaroscuro*, part of the art historical vocabulary, is often left untranslated.

Carrier has proposed that "styles of artwriting change because the general culture changes and because there is a felt need to say something new."[72] Writers on Chinese art a hundred years ago looked at Chinese painting through western modes of perception. Soon, however, it was realized that the Chinese textual tradition had to be taken into account as well. The study of Chinese painting is now at a point where Chinese and western modes of perception are being combined as Chinese scholars in China are seeing how the discipline of western art history can be of use for them.

This exchange of differing perceptions has, then, made the discipline of art history richer,

and not just among the scholars of Chinese painting. It can have an effect which radiates wider. Looking at a Chinese landscape painting may open our mind to experience fresh winds in a landscape.

NOTES

[1] In Jane Turner, ed.: *The Dictionary of Art*, vol. 24. London 1996, 485-495.
[2] Svetlana Alpers: *The Art of Describing*. Chicago 1983, xix.
[3] I have dealt with this topic more extensively in "Pictorial Space in Chinese Paintings: Interpretations of Western Art Historians," University of Helsinki, Department of Art History, unpublished Licenciate of Arts Thesis, 1997.
[4] Margaret Hagen: *Varieties of Realism: Geometries of Representational Art*. Cambridge 1986, 310.
[5] James J. Gibson: *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. Boston 1979, 60.
[6] Stephen Kosslyn: *Image and Mind*. Cambridge (MA) and London 1980, 2, 438-441.
[7] Kosslyn 1980, 2, 438-441.
[8] Hayden B.J. Maginnis: "The Role of Perceptual Learning in Connoisseurship: Morelli, Berenson, and Beyond," *Art History*, vol. 13, nr. 1, 113.
[9] Maurice Merleau-Ponty: *Silmä ja mieli*. Transl. Kimmo Pasanen. Helsinki 1993 (1964), 40-42.
[10] Gibson 1979, 3.
[11] Margaret Hagen: "A New Theory of the Psychology of Representational Art." In *Perception and Pictorial Representation*, eds. Dennis Fischer and Calvin Nodine, New York 1979, 196. I am not reviewing her criticism of these three scholars here, but only illustrating some aspects of their work relevant to my topic.
[12] Gibson 1979, 292.
[13] Norman Bryson: "Semiology and Visual Interpretation." in *Visual Theory*, ed. Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey, Cambridge 1996 (1991), 61-62.
[14] Rudolph Arnheim: *Visual Thinking*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1969, 137.
[15] James J. Gibson: "Foreword: A Prefatory Essay on the Perception of Surfaces versus the Perception of Markings on the Surface" in *The Perception of Pictures*. Vol. I: Alberti's Window. Ed. Margaret A. Hagen. New York 1980, xiii-xvii.
[16] Arnheim 1969, 13-15.
[17] Ralph Norman Haber: "Perceiving Space from Pictures: A Theoretical Analysis" in *The Perception of Pictures*. Vol. I: Alberti's Window. Ed. Margaret A. Hagen. New York 1980, 24-25.
[18] Haber 1980, 15-17.
[19] Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih: *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*. Cambridge (MA) and London 1985, 9-10.
[20] The text has been transmitted in "Record of Famous Painters of All the Dynasties" (Lidai minghua ji) 847 by Zhang Yanyuan (ca. 815-after 875), which was first known in Ming editions. One must be aware of the problem of textual corruptions and abbreviations: see Bush and Shih 1985, 20. The attribution to Gu Kaizhi is not certain.
[21] Bush & Shih 1985, 34. The translation is by Shih. She draws a connection to the descriptions of landscape in contemporary poetry on p. 21.
[22] Michael Sullivan: *The Birth of Landscape Painting in China*. London and Berkeley 1962, 94. On p. 95: Sullivan uses a painting on a biwa from the Shosoin, Nara, dating from the seventh or early eight Century as a visual reference when explaining his translation: "It may be that (Gu) with his more primitive techniques, was striving for just such an effect."
[23] Kiyohiko Munakata: *Sacred Mountains in Chinese Art*. Urbana and Chicago 1991, 37. Munakata uses the "Mountain" scene of the "The Admonitions of the Court Instructress" scroll (British Museum, London) as visual reference.
[24] Alexander Soper: "Life-motion and the Sense of Space in Early Chinese Representational Art," *Art Bulletin* 30, 1948, 177. Soper translates only two sentences from Gu's text in connection with excerpts from other texts. On p. 176 Soper wished to demonstrate with the help of these examples that Chinese art was "more developed" in pre-Tang times than it was in the view of his teacher George Rowley.
[25] Hubert Delahaye: *Les premieres peintures de paysage en Chine: aspects religieux*. Paris 1981, 14.
[26] William Acker, trans. and annotated: *Some T'ang and Pre-T'ang Texts on Chinese Painting*. Sinica Leidensia. Leiden 1974, 73.
[27] Munakata 1991, 37-38.
[28] Delahaye 1981, 14-15.
[29] Both of these texts are also found in Zhang Yanyuan's compilation, see note #23.
[30] Bush and Shih 1985, 37.
[31] Leon Hurvitz ("Tsung P'ing's Comments on Landscape Painting," *Artibus Asiae* 32, 1970, 152) and Osvald Sirén (*The Chinese on the Art of Painting*. Reprint. New York and Hong Kong, 1963(1936), 15) translate lei as "likeness"; Alexander Soper ("Early Chinese Landscape Painting," *Art Bulletin* 23/21941, 164) as "resemblance"; Hubert Delahaye (1981, 100) as "ressemblance" and "semble". Mathews' *Chinese-English Dictionary* (Cambridge (MA) 1966, 602) defines it as "a class, a species, a kind."
[32] Munakata 1991, 40.
[33] For a translation of all of them, see Bush & Shih 1985, 40. The translation there is by Acker. For a discussion on the various translations, see Bush & Shih 1985, 10-14.
[34] William Cohn: *Chinese Painting*. London 1948, 34-35.
[35] John C. Ferguson: *Chinese Painting*. Chicago 1927, 30; Otto Fischer: *Chinesische Landschaftsmalerei. München 1923*, 119; Wen Fong: *Beyond Representation, Chinese Painting and Calligraphy 8th - 14th Century*. New York, New Haven and London 1992, 20; Max Loehr: *The Great Painters of China*. Oxford 1980, 14; Hsio-yen Shih: "Early Chinese Pictorial Style: From the Later Han to the Six Dynasties." PhD Thesis, Bryn Mawr College. Ann Arbor 1961, 47; Sirén 1963 (1936), 219; Joan Stanley-Baker: *Old Masters Repainted*. Hong Kong 1995, 11-12; Arthur Waley: *An Introduction to the Study of Chinese Painting*. London 1923, 72.
[36] Sirén 1963 (1936), 20-21.
[37] Ferguson 1927, 104-105; Benjamin March: *Some Technical Terms of Chinese Painting*. Baltimore 1935, 26.
[38] Francois Cheng: *Vide et Plein: Le Langage Pictural Chinois*. Paris 1979, 64; Roger Goepper: *The Essence of Chinese Painting*. Boston 1963, 178.
[39] Bush & Shih 1985, 168-169. The translation is based on a version by Hay.
[40] Stanley Murashige: "Rhythm, Order, Change, and Nature in Guo Xi's Early Spring". *Monumenta Serica* 43, 1995, 342.
[41] John Hay: "Surface and the Chinese Painter: The

Discovery of Surface", *Archives of Asian Art* 38, 1985, 122.
[42] John Hay: "Huang Kung-wang's Dwelling in the Fu-ch'un Mountains, The Dimensions of a Landscape." PhD Thesis, Princeton. Ann Arbor 1978, 149-150.
[43] Valerie Malenfer: "Dream Journey over Xiao and Xiang: Scholar-Amateur Landscape Painting in Southern Sung China (1127-1279)." Ph.D. Thesis, Harvard. Ann Arbor 1990, 146.
[44] Murashige 1995, 349.
[45] Wilfrid Wells: "A New Approach to Chinese Painting" (manuscript). "Sirén-arkivet," Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, Stockholm, n.d., 9.
[46] William Dunning: *Changing Images of Pictorial Space: A History of Spatial Illusion*. Syracuse 1991, 104.
[47] *Images of the Mind*, Selections from the Edward L. Elliott Family and John B. Elliott Collections of Chinese Calligraphy and Painting at the Art Museum, Princeton University. Wen C. Fong et al., Princeton 1984, 20-21.
[48] *Images of the Mind*, 1984, 11.
[49] *Images of the Mind*, 1984, 23.
[50] *Images of the Mind*, 1984, 47; Fong 1992, 83.
[51] Richard Barnhart: Marriage of the Lord of the River: A Lost Landscape by Tung Yüan. *Artibus Asiae Supplementum 27*. Ascona 1970, 30-32; Robert Maeda: *Two Sung Texts on Chinese Painting and the Landscape Styles of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*. New York 1978, 135.
[52] Wai-kam Ho and Dawn Ho Delbanco: "Tung Ch'i-ch'ang's Transcendence of History and Art." *The Century of Tung Ch'i-ch'ang 1555-1636*, vol. I, ed. Wai-kam Ho, Kansas City 1992, 25.
[53] Maeda 1978, 135-136.
[54] John Hay: "Some Questions Concerning Classicism in Relation to Chinese Art." *Art Journal*, vol. 47, 1988, 31; my italics.
[55] Hay 1988, 31; my italics.
[56] *Images of the Mind*, 1984, 48; Fong 1992, 93.
[57] James Cahill: *Chinese Painting*. Lausanne 1960, 37. Fong has termed this as "landscape of emotion", see for example, Fong 1996, 130.
[58] John Hay: "Changing Landscape in Southern Song." *International Symposium on Art Historical Studies 2*. Osaka 1983, 78.
[59] See, for example, Marianne Ebersold: "Atmosphäre in früher chinesischer Landschaftsmalerei: Versuch einer Deutung." Inaug.- Diss. zur Phil.Dr. Bonn 1979, 175, 191 and 246.
[60] Hay 1985, 100. This is most notable in calligraphy.
[61] Hay 1985, 107.
[62] *Images of the Mind*, 1984, 20.
[63] Malenfer 1990, 129; see also Caron Smith: "The Fan K'uan Tradition in Chinese Landscape Painting." PhD Thesis, New York University. Ann Arbor 1990, 19.
[64] John Hay: "Poetic Space: Ch'ien Hsüan and the Association of Painting and Poetry." *Words and Images*, eds. Alfreda Murck and Wen Fong. New York 1991, 180.
[65] In *Images of the Mind* (1984) Fong dated the painting to ca. mid-12th Century and now in Fong 1996 (pp. 121-122) it is placed ca one hundred years earlier, to ca. 1050.
[66] Osvald Sirén: *Chinese Painting. Leading Masters and Principles*. Vol. 4. London and New York 1958, 22.
[67] Handscrolls are usually several metres long. In addition to the painted image, they contain sections reserved for the title of the painting and for written commentary. Traditionally, a handscroll is viewed section by section. A detailed discussion of the handscroll as a painting format is found in Hung Wu: *The Double Screen: Medium and Representation in Chinese Painting*. London 1996, 57-68.
[68] *Images of the Mind*, 1984, 70.
[69] James Cahill: *Hills Beyond a River: Chinese Painting of the Yüan Dynasty*, 1279-1368. New York and Tokyo 1976, 41-42.
[70] Hay 1988, 67.
[71] Dunning 1991, 89.
[72] David Carrier: *Principles of Art History Writing*. University Park (PA) 1991, 31.