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The Interiority of Landscape: Transcendence in a Late-Ming Painting of Snowy Mountains

ABSTRACT:

This article argues that late-Ming-era landscape paintings can be understood best historically in the context of such cultural practices as Daoist visualization and the discourses that accompanied it. Taking a Snowy Mountains-themed painting, it critiques the Cartesian perspective by demonstrating that landscape paintings were not regarded as closed objects available to the thinking subject for mere aesthetic appreciation. Instead, they were thought to possess an interiority that afforded space for the human spirit to roam in. A certain teleology associated with this practice was the merging of the beholder's human body with that of a purported broader cosmic body, thereby also giving interiority to the physical world – including landscape. Access to this space, or, “entering the mountains,” allowed for a momentary yet reproducible experience of transcendence. To make this argument, the article draws upon late-imperial narrative prose, Daoist texts, and other materials from the same period, all describing the cultural significance of this pattern of interiority, accessibility, visualization, and merging of bodies.

KEYWORDS:

landscape, interiority, paintings of “mountains and water,” Daoism, art, ritual, visualization, Snowy Mountains

Several common presuppositions hinder a thorough understanding of Chinese landscape painting. To the extent that our research is always already entangled in modern categories,¹ it requires painstaking effort to remain mindful of the fact that many of these presuppositions do not hold universally. Thus, seeing seventeenth-century brushwork

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I WOULD like to thank Raoul Birnbaum and Stephen Little for inviting me to the symposium at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, “Alternate Dreams: 17th-Century Chinese Paintings from the Tsao Family Collection,” October 15–16, 2016. The paper I presented there and developed into the present essay benefited much from their comments, and from those of other participants, particularly Jonathan Chaves, Noelle Giuffrida, and James Benn. I am also much indebted to Raoul Birnbaum, Chen Lang, Kathy Mak, Fabien Simonis, and Tobias Zürn for their insightful critique of later drafts, and to Li Yuhang for recommending several scholarly writings. Finally, the two anonymous readers who reviewed the article for *Asia Major* did much to improve it by their excellent suggestions and questions.

¹ When I use the word “modern” and situate “ourselves” in modernity, I am referring to a set of assumptions about the world that is shared – completely or partly – by many (but not all) thinking subjects in industrialized cultures roughly since the beginning of the twentieth

from Jiangnan through a contemporary and Eurocentric lens, it is hard not to let the label “art” emerge, although it is a corollary of modern worldviews. Even though not everyone will agree on what exactly the term “art” means, as a modern category it comes embedded in an excess of expectations regarding aesthetic skill, creativity, meaning, taxonomy, and evolutionary narratives about a certain historical progression. Similarly, although everyday usage of the term “landscape” seems to affirm it as a natural and universal concept, it, too, has emerged under specifically modern ideological circumstances.

In this article, I would like to probe various worldviews and correlated categories that will be fruitful for shaping an accurate appraisal of Chinese landscapes. In the first half I will contrast prevailing modern readings with hitherto marginalized readings from medieval China – a formative period for the “art” of landscape. In the second half I move towards a discussion of several paintings from approximately the late-Ming (the dynasty spanning 1368–1644) through early-Qing (1644–1911) dynasties, reading them alongside seventeenth-century stories by literati who socialized with the painters of these works. This allows me to describe alternative modes of perception rooted in presuppositions different from modern ones. In particular, I will work towards an analysis of one snowy-landscape painting from the hands of the late-Ming painter Wang Jianzhang 王建章 (fl. early-seventeenth century) by contextualizing it with various contemporaneous landscape paintings, literati stories, and ritual materials.² (See figure 1; all figures are presented at the end of the article.)

I start by laying out three presuppositions that have been deeply determined through modern ways of thinking. The first may be the primary one from which the others follow: it is the prevailing belief in the Cartesian dichotomy of mind and matter, or the autonomy of the “mind” within a rational subject as the cognitive receiver of an empirically “objective” world outside. It is a version of reality that is often

century. It is represented by assumptions about an evolutionary sense of “progress” that applies to nature and humanity, a Cartesian belief in the unique primacy of “mind” in relation to “matter,” a secularism that situates divine power in a realm largely divorced from everyday proximity, and that are more or less merged into a belief – incomplete or perfect – that science and technology are the main harbingers of hope for humanity and the world. As with all definitions, the thinking subjects referred to do not form a neatly organized and clearly identifiable group of people, but more of an Everyman who might be recognizable to all critical thinkers, even if they do not identify with all aspects of my definition. Certainly, I do not want to pretend I am perfectly capable of disentangling myself from modernity.

² This painting is included in an exhibition catalogue edited by Stephen Little, *17th-Century Chinese Paintings from the Tsao Family Collection* (Los Angeles: LACMA and Delmonico Books, 2016).

projected back in time, and subsequently attributed to other reasonable and “rational” people – such as those among the late-imperial Chinese – thus applying the same self-perception as individual subjects in a world of observable (other) objects.³

Perhaps because of the above presupposition about rationality there exists the second, and distinctly modern, worldview – the secular one. It is applied to those phenomena that conventional cognition classifies as ordinary empirical realities without inherent “religious” meaning. Landscapes appear to belong to such a category, and I will juxtapose it with views of landscapes that hold them to be sacred. Landscapes and their painted depictions are not things most people feel comfortable straightforwardly labeling as religious, even though the European tradition of landscape painting has deep roots in Christian ideology.⁴ Regardless of such religious roots, for the average modern observer, painted (or actual) landscapes simply do not readily invite interpretations related to the sacred.⁵ The common response is to assume that a landscape is just that: a landscape, that is, a configuration of mountains, trees, rivers, and other things that belong to the natural world outside of the artist or viewer. As a composition, those elements may add up to a spectacular drama of natural forces, perhaps even alluding to a deeper spiritual experience, but today most explanations of a landscape will be formulated in terms of biology or geology, or,

³ For similar arguments, see Mathias Obert, “Imagination or Response? Some Remarks on the Understanding of Images and Pictures in Pre-Modern China,” in Bernd Huppau and Christoph Wulf, eds., *Dynamics and Performativity of Imagination: The Image Between the Visible and the Invisible* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 116–34. I thank Tobias Zürn for bringing this work to my attention. Also see Mark Meulenbeld, “Daoist Modes of Perception: ‘Registering’ the Living Manifestations of Sire Thunder, and Why Zhuang Zi Is Relevant,” *Daoism: Religion, History and Society* 道教研究學報 8 (Dec. 2016), pp. 33–89.

⁴ That is to say, early European painters used landscapes as a setting for Christian themes, but this does not necessarily make the landscapes they painted also “sacred.” Examples include Giotto di Bondone’s (ca. 1267–1337) *Flight into Egypt* from ca. 1304–06, which shows the newborn Jesus Christ transported through the desert. Much more closely resembling Chinese landscape paintings in the prominence afforded to mountains and their dramatic shapes is a series of etchings and engravings from around 1555 made by Johannes van Doetecum the elder (fl. 1554–89), after Pieter Bruegel the elder (ca. 1525/30–1569). Yet these landscapes, too, are used as backdrop to religious scenes like *The Penitent Magdalene* (*Magdalena poenitens*), or *St. Jerome in the Wilderness* (*S. Hieronymus in Deserto*).

⁵ Although my analysis, below, does not touch upon landscape’s correlate concept, wilderness, it is useful to realize that many concepts related to nature were coined under specific historical circumstances, thereby reflecting something very ideological and thus “unnatural.” In the groundbreaking discussions by William Cronon, we are reminded that – in the context of 19th-c. nature-conservation movements in the U.S. – even the attribution of a sacred quality to nature took place within the context of distinctly American modes of thought. See Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” in idem, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York City: W. W. Norton & Co., 1995), pp. 69–90.

insofar as landscape is a phenomenon that can be observed, some may apply concepts from psychology or certain areas of epistemology that deal with cognition.

Finally, we have a third presupposition. It is closely related to the first two, but it applies more narrowly to the category of landscape – a phenomenon with a type of being or ontology to which we have no access. This presupposition suggests exclusivity: even if people enter a forest, the trees exist only outside of them and the being of the humans is not merged with that of the trees. Subsequently, when those same people view a landscape painting, their perception similarly stops at the visual forms on the pictorial surface, captured in Chinese by the broad generic label “mountains and water” (山水 *shanshui*): it appears to refer only to the most prominently visible shapes in landscapes and landscape paintings. Modern attitudes towards a painted landscape differ little from the commodified view of the physical landscape itself, as if it were some entity whose categorical difference from human beings facilitates its availability for exploitation, as described by Marcel Gauchet: “it lies before us, radically external and fully appropriable.”⁶

All three of these presuppositions concern distance (and difference) – namely, an empirical distance separating the inner mind from the external world, a rational distance from the sacred, and an impermeable gap between the “being” of a human and the “being” of a landscape. Instead, premodern Chinese modes of perception seem to imply otherwise, that human beings and landscapes are connected through a shared interiority, a realm of being where objective differences become less acute, where autonomy of self is no longer defined on the basis of social identity but through its equivalence with environment, world, and cosmos. In this view, the ontology of a landscape (painted or not) is equivalent to that of a human being, and vice versa; so much so that they are formulated in each other’s image, embodying each other’s image.

The shared ontology of (the bodies of) human beings with their environing world is also the domain of Daoism, where it serves as a basic given throughout “philosophical” and “religious” spheres alike. My analysis approaches Ming-era landscapes – in painting, literature, and ritual – from the vantage point of Daoist theory and practice. It is my hope to convince scholars of Daoism that their interpretive nets can (and should) be cast more widely, not limiting themselves to topics that

⁶ Marcel Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion*, trans. Oscar Burge (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1997), p. 69.

concern priests and other clerics as they provide narrow definitions of the forms and manifestations of the broad category called Daoism. At the same time, I also hope to persuade art historians to abandon the comfort of their all-too-secular assumptions, in which they view “art” as an interpretive realm for finding metaphor, metonymy, and other secondary meanings.⁷ Hopefully it becomes evident that such interpretative habits always preclude any immediate access to the realm embodied by landscape, oftentimes inserting a lens that only sees a realm of politics, or a realm of “individual expression.”

In an otherwise excellent study by Foong Ping, *The Efficacious Landscape: On the Authorities of Painting at the Northern Song Court*, the same modern distinctions, as mentioned above, inform the entire analysis. While it is true that Foong uses the term “efficacy” in the book title, seemingly associating landscape with magic power, she explains the term in barely any religious sense. The author states that her book “will reveal the ink landscape’s particular strengths – its efficacy – for ritual, social, and political negotiation, in its ability to communicate through implication and to transcend limitations of the concrete.”⁸ Even if the primacy of socio-political hermeneutics (negotiation, communication, implication – meanings) seems to be complemented at least by the addition of ritual practice, the notion of ritual is not taken as a means to produce efficacy in a religious sense, but analyzed within “the politically contested milieu of ritual *discourse*” (italics mine); that is, negotiations of political power represented by *interpretations* of ritual.⁹ Overall, Foong’s book is a study of how landscape painting and politics were intertwined.¹⁰ And, according to her, this intertwinement of landscape and “imperial power” had come into being under “more secular circumstances” around the end of the first millennium AD than during the “religious outlook” of earlier times.¹¹ In sum, even in one of the most recent and innovative works on traditional landscape painting, the final interpretation remains firmly wedded to secular conceptions of politics and their discursive manifestations.

As long as one is content to categorize Chinese landscapes exclusively as objects of “art,” ignoring the tight associations of the human

⁷ See Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 2004), p. 24.

⁸ Foong Ping, *The Efficacious Landscape: On the Authorities of Painting at the Northern Song Court* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015), p. 25.

⁹ Ibid., p. 111.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 58.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 18.

body and the cosmic body in traditional China, most interpretive directions will remain tied to the artistic dogma of individual expression, of singular geniuses who are politically engaged with a critique of society (or secular imperial politics) via their artistic products, or perhaps tied to court painters who painted mere objects for elite appreciation. While I don't want to exclude the possibility of political or aesthetic undertones in Daoist enterprises (Daoist recluses wandering among mountains surely *also* may be said to represent a disavowal of the world, and there is *also* much beauty in such an endeavor), I suggest that the language of Chinese landscapes is better understood within a framework that refers to the sacred in its most exalted dimensions. In particular, landscapes must be seen as images pointing the beholder towards transcendental realms of existence. They transcend exclusive notions of "subject" (self) and "object" (other), sharing cosmic patterns that may differ in visual manifestations on the surface but that are coherent in underlying systemic principles. Both are structured as a cosmic body, containing an inner landscape. Both are body-scapes, and both contain an interiority as much as they are contained within it. As we will see later, this sort of conceptualization of the human body beyond that of an individual subject determines "transcendence" to be immanent.

As a way of divorcing *shanshui* paintings from the naturalized secular gaze commonly applied to them, I propose to cease using the term "landscape" as a translation. Instead I translate *shanshui hua* 山水畫 as "mountains and water painting." Yet, to understand the big interpretive gap that exists between the Chinese phenomenon of *shanshui* and the English term landscape, we will need to examine different ways of perceiving both the topics of "mountains and water" and of landscape.

MANIFESTATIONS OF THE LANDSCAPE

In order to familiarize ourselves with different ways of viewing landscapes, Michael Sullivan's discussions of early-Chinese paintings of "mountains and water" might serve as a starting point. In them, he attributes a distinctly articulated formal language to this art, suggesting that if Chinese "mountains and water" painting does not fulfil Eurocentric expectations of realism, it is not an evolutionary lack of maturity, or a lack of artistic skill. In his words: "This is no hesitant, fumbling attempt to depict a real landscape; even if we allow for the high degree of stylization in the landscape forms, they suggest a freedom and ease of execution born out of long experience and familiar-

ity with an abstract pictorial language.”¹² His point would seem to be that, accustomed to seeing landscape as an objective reality, what the modern, analytical eye has a hard time grasping is exactly the stylization of Chinese “mountains and water” paintings, using a somewhat abstract language to depict its inherent patterns.

A complicating factor is that even the category of “landscape” itself is less of an objective reality than its customary usage suggests – not just *painted* landscape, of course, but even the landscape we may see in our everyday reality. Karatani Kōjin has beautifully shown that, in the Japanese context, one of the results of modernization was precisely the discovery of landscape as an empirical category, one that had not existed prior to the Meiji Reforms of the nineteenth century. Much of this new category was related to the emergence of the individual perspective on the world, that of the thinking subject, and was even tied to the newly found principles of linear perspective that had come to dominate European painting. In Karatani’s words, “Cartesian philosophy, for example, can be seen as a product of principles of perspective. For the subject of Descartes’s ‘cogito ergo sum’ is confined, ineluctably, within the schema established by the conventions of perspective. It was precisely in the same period that the ‘object’ of thought came to be conceived of as a homogeneous, scientifically measurable entity – that is, as an extension of the principles of perspective.”¹³ Among the things conveyed by Karatani is the transformative effect that newfound principles of linear perspective had on the perception of the thinking subject, in that it subsequently could ascribe to itself a (unique) perspective *as* a subject – detached from the objective outer world, such as the landscape. Applied concretely to the stylized “mountains and water” paintings of Chinese art, I would add, this has profound consequences for the way that an observer might relate to a painting. In a painting with linear perspective, the sense of self is strongly evoked: it narrowly determines the specific place of a distinct, observing self in a precisely located world. In the aperspectival or multi-perspectival world of Chinese “mountains and water” painting, however, one can lose oneself: one does not need to specify one’s position, and thus one does not inevitably require an outsider’s perspective. Observers of such “mountains and water” vistas can thereby, as it were, be drawn in.

¹² Michael Sullivan, *The Birth of Chinese Landscape Painting* (Berkeley: U. California P., 1962) 1, pp. 41–42.

¹³ Karatani Kōjin, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature* (Durham and London: Duke U.P., 1993), pp. 34–35. I am indebted to Tom Noel for bringing Karatani’s work to my attention.

In a recent work on the distinctly modern, Western, assumption that man and nature belong to different categories of being, the anthropologist Philippe Descola has noted similar dynamics in relation to linear perspective. He sees the artist's viewpoint as formative for the Cartesian paradigm: "In this way, linear perspective established in the domain of representation the possibility of the kind of confrontation between the individual and nature that was to become characteristic of modern ideology and of which landscape painting would become the artistic expression."¹⁴ Taking his inspiration from a famous essay by Erwin Panofsky that sees the "projective geometry of the seventeenth century" as a "product of the artist's workshop," Descola finds that "the invention of new tools for making reality visible [for example, the microscope and telescope] made it possible to establish a new relationship with the world."¹⁵

Descola's argument about this new relationship is supported by theological shifts in perceiving the natural world. The historian Peter Harrison observes that "for the early Middle Ages the intelligibility of nature lay primarily in its moral and theological meanings, rather than in sets of causal relations."¹⁶ That is, before the Cartesian revolution, European modes of perceiving nature were determined by religious understandings of the world's divine architecture, and one needed contemplative practices to understand the symbols before one's eyes. After the seventeenth century, however, the idea of God's design became reformulated in terms that required mathematical skills; "Nature, on this model, consists of idealized geometrical entities rather than divinely instituted symbols."¹⁷ The history of its impact on art still needs to be written, but no doubt it constitutes another "departure from religion."¹⁸

By contrast, from the moment they emerged as a genre of representation, Chinese depictions of "mountains and water" can hardly be encountered outside of religious modes of perception, not simply as an external or secular reality. The miniaturized mountain-worlds of the Later Han dynasty (25–220 AD) were clearly conceived as immortals' realms, replete with transcendental beings roaming 遊 within them.¹⁹

¹⁴ Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Chicago: U. Chicago P., 2013), p. 60.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

¹⁶ Peter Harrison, *The Territories of Science and Religion* (Chicago: U. Chicago P., 2017), p. 60.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

¹⁸ Gauchet, *Disenchantment of the World*.

¹⁹ The classic work on this topic is by Rolf Stein, *The World in Miniature: Container Gardens*

Poetry from this time, describing mountains and water, refers extensively to these constructed paradises in very religious terms, much as it does for describing natural, actual, mountains and water.²⁰ If we disregard the generic label of “landscape painting” that keeps us tied to aesthetic modes of understanding from the European tradition, we find that Chinese depictions of “mountains and water” have distinct connections to otherworldly realms at least since the seventh century, or even earlier,²¹ when mountainous landscapes were depicted on the walls of tombs – possibly as a space for the soul to roam in,²² or as opening up potential for a “passage into paradise.”²³

More broadly speaking in terms of perceiving mountains, rivers, or what we innocently call landscapes nowadays, the secular view of the world would have been hard to reconcile with the pervasive worship of Chinese mountains as embodiments of divinities, epitomized by the five sacred mountains,²⁴ or the general perception of mountainous land-

and Dwellings in Far Eastern Religious Thought, trans. Phyllis Brooks (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1990). For a fully researched relationship to landscape painting, see Sullivan, *Birth of Chinese Landscape Painting*, pp. 29–30. Sullivan quotes from Ban Gu’s 班固 (32–92 AD) “Liangdu fu” 兩都賦 (“Rhapsody on the Two Capitals,” esp. “Rhapsody on the Western Capital” 西都賦), which describes the “imperial hunting park near Changan” and esp. the “view from the top of the observation tower,” whence can be seen high waves, “breaking against the rocks of the fairy shore, half-submerged in water. With a crash they hurl themselves against the fairy rocks, covering isles Ying-chou and Fang-hu, while P’eng-lai rises between them.” The poem goes on to mention the famous transcendents Wang Ziqiao 王子喬 and Chisong Zi 赤松子 (often abbreviated in literature simply as “Song [and] Qiao 松喬”), who roamed in it. Similar miniature paradises are mentioned in other literature, such as the “huge fairy mountain” described also in Sullivan, pp. 29–30, or the “mountain gods and ocean spirits 山神海靈” depicted on palace walls (pp. 34–35). Several studies have convincingly shown the need to take representations of landscape more seriously in a religious and spiritual sense. See Lothar Ledderose, “Religious Elements in Landscape Art,” in Susan Bush and Christian Murck, eds., *Theories of the Arts in China* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1983), pp. 165–83.

²⁰ Zornica Kirkova has shown that a great number of famous medieval poems about transcendental realms were “not imaginary visions of the elusive paradises ... but descriptions of actual sights: earthly simulacra [of immortals’ realms].” See her *Roaming into the Beyond: Representations of Xian Immortality in Early Medieval Chinese Verse* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), p. 161, and more generally, chap. 4.

²¹ See the depiction of Mt. Kunlun as a cosmic pillar on the outside surface of a layer of the nested lacquer coffins in Mawangdui, figures 3.35, 3.37, and 3.38 in Lillian Lan-ying Tseng, *Picturing Heaven in Early China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011), pp. 188–91. Thanks to Kathy Mak for pointing out this reference.

²² Zheng Yan 鄭岩, “Tang Han Xiu mubihua shanshuitu chuyi” 唐韓休墓壁畫山水圖芻議, *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 故宮博物院院刊 5 (2015), pp. 87–159.

²³ James Cahill, *Three Alternative Histories of Chinese Painting* (Lawrence, Kansas: The Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, 1988), p. 46. Thanks to Aaron Reich for pointing out this passage to me.

²⁴ Édouard Chavannes, *Le T’ai Chan, essai de monographie d’un culte chinois* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1910); James Robson, *The Power of Place: The Religious Landscape of the Southern Sacred Peak* (Nanyue 南嶽) in *Medieval China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard East Asian Monographs, 2009).

scapes that were both “demon-ridden” and “dwellings of immortals.”²⁵ Traditional modes of perception seem conventionally to open up the landscape to the presence of spirits, gods, and the realm of the sacred. John Hay, in his insightful study of the rock in Chinese art, has made a compelling argument for the need to read rocks (and miniature landscapes) as objects that represent such divine realms, and that capture extraordinary powers.²⁶ Even more directly pointing towards “mountains and water” paintings as concretely open spaces, as Lothar Ledderose suggests, “painters are also said to have disappeared in their painted landscapes. The tiny figures that one finds so often in later paintings remind the viewer that such a possibility might still exist.”²⁷

Contrary to the detached objectivity of a modern onlooker, it seems clear from these first examples that Chinese depictions of “mountains and water” may hold more than our gaze can cognitively grasp, more than merely observable representations of the physical world. They embody spiritual realms that observers can relate to on a plane that goes beyond cognition, rendering such realms largely permeable. Indeed, what I am proposing here is that, when looking at seventeenth-century Chinese “mountains and water” paintings, we must recover their interiority, their containing spaces into which human presences enter.

THE INTERIORITY OF LANDSCAPE

To say that “mountains and water” possess interiority, a term usually meaning what is beyond the physical surface of human bodies – an inner being or inner state of mind, suggests some equivalence between a landscape and the human body. Indeed, from early times onwards “body” and “world” in China were seen as versions of the same cosmic schema, differing mainly in magnitude. For early China, Nathan Sivin has laid out systematic (and systemic) correspondences between the two realms. He ties them together, saying that “the body was defined not by what sets it apart but by its intimate, dynamic relation with its environment.”²⁸ He shows us that this basic congruence of body and cosmos is described in texts from the third and second centuries BC. We also find it, of course, in Han dynasty Daoist texts, such as the *Xiang'er*

²⁵ Franciscus Verellen, “Encounter as Revelation: A Taoist Hagiographic Theme in Medieval China,” *BEFEO* 85 (1998), p. 373.

²⁶ John Hay, *Kernels of Energy, Bones of Earth: The Rock in Chinese Art* (New York City: China House Gallery, 1985), p. 58 ff.; also Stein, *World in Miniature*.

²⁷ Ledderose, “Religious Elements,” p. 180.

²⁸ Nathan Sivin, “State, Cosmos, and Body in the Last Three Centuries BCE,” *HJAS* 55.1 (1995), p. 14.

想爾 commentary to the *Lao Zi*, which says that “the human body is in the image of the cosmos 人身像天地,”²⁹ or also in the *Central Scripture of Lao Zi* (*Lao Zi zhongjing* 老子中經): “Our human body is equal to the cosmos 兆身與天地等也.”³⁰ Note that the analogy is often expressed in terms of imagery, a point also recently made by Tobias Zürn.³¹ This really was a widespread idea, as we even find it in texts by other Han-era authors who were generally critical of Daoist (or Confucian) ideology. For example, In *Lunheng* 論衡, by Wang Chong 王充 (27–ca. 100), this is articulated in various ways: “The cosmos is in the likeness of the human body 天地猶人身,”³² or vice versa, as the cosmos having a body that “equals that of a human being 與人同.”³³ This homology remained at the core of a basic Chinese understanding of the world (and the body) into the premodern age.

By the time of the Eastern Jin dynasty (265–420), the interlinking of body and cosmos had become elevated to a prime subject of discourse in Daoism’s Shangqing 上清 (“Upper Clarity”) scriptures from the fourth century. Stephen Bokenkamp says that in them, “there is an intensification of the homology of part and function between the human body and the cosmos, microcosm and macrocosm.”³⁴ Isabelle Robinet relates this Shangqing discourse to the difficulty of excluding mind from matter, arguing that these two dimensions of being are mediated by images. Literally, Robinet claims, images constitute an interface between the everyday reality of physical objects and the other reality of metaphysical entities: “Everything happens in the world of Images, where ‘spirits take physical form and bodies take spiritual form.’ This world is a kind of intermediary between the world of tangible realities and that of ineffable realities ...”³⁵ Ultimately, as both Bokenkamp and Robinet make clear, the realization of the homology afforded human

²⁹ Rao Zongyi 饒宗頤, *Laozi xiang'erzhu jiaozheng* 老子想爾注校證 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2015), p. 18. Stephen Bokenkamp’s translation slightly differs, in his *Early Daoist Scriptures* (Berkeley: U. California P., 1997), p. 90.

³⁰ *Taishang Laojun zhongjing* 太上老君中經; carried in *Zhengtong Daozang* 正統道藏, numbering of titles according to Kristofer Schipper and Franciscus Verellen, eds. *The Taoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the Daozang* (*Daozang Tongkao* 道藏通考) (Chicago: U. Chicago P., 2004; hereafter cited as DZ), no. 1168, j. 1, p. 13b.

³¹ Tobias Zürn, “The Han *Imaginaire* of Writing as Weaving: Intertextuality and the *Huainanzi*’s Self Fashioning as an Embodiment of the Way,” *JAS* 79.2 (May 2020), pp. 367–402.

³² Wang Chong 王充, *Lunheng* 論衡 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1996), p. 785.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 1000: 天地有體 ... 與人同矣.

³⁴ Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, p. 277.

³⁵ Robinet, *Taoism: Growth of a Religion*, trans. Phyllis Brooks (1992; Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1997), p. 122.

bodies access to the primordial forces of cosmogony. Again its efficacy is rooted in images.

Beyond the confines of Daoist revelation literature, like the Shang-qing scriptures, a homology between body and landscape, both being vessels for transmitting the Dao, was also a discursive theme in literary circles during that same period.³⁶ One famous statement about paintings of “mountains and water” relates them to the sacred power par excellence – the Dao 道, or “Way.” Zong Bing 宗炳 (375–443), with his writing titled “An Introduction to Painting Mountains and Water” 畫山水序 (“Hua shanshui xu”), produced “an essay that defined landscape painting’s primary purpose as a medium for accessing the numinous powers attributed to mountains.”³⁷ In it, he likens landscape (painting) to the way that sages assimilate with the Dao: “As for the saintly person, he emulates the Dao through his spirit, and thus the sages make it pervasive. As for *shanshui*, it elevates (or, displays³⁸) the Dao through forms 形, and thus humane people rejoice. Are these not akin? 夫聖人, 以神法道, 而賢者通。山水以形媚道, 而仁者樂, 不亦幾乎。” Form is here used as a term that describes manifestations of landscape, but the same word could also stand for “body,” which is implicit in Zong Bing’s analogy with the sage. Form, indeed especially when manifested as “mountains and water,” was itself an expression of sacred power – tangibly so, with even the manufactured forms within paintings that emanate such power. To make this explicit, Zong Bing says that, whether it is the flourishing luxuriance of mountains or the “numinous energy of the spirit of the valley, it can all be obtained from one picture.”³⁹ In line with the homology described above, Zong Bing also claims that “efficacy 靈” can be attained by means of an “image 圖.”

Literally, though painted as “mountains and water,” what the shapes of the earth embody is the force of the Dao – mediated by the body. In that sense, painting and calligraphy from the Eastern Jin period can be (and have been) described precisely as a “body art” – a form of practice that engages the whole body and applies a plethora of “body forces during the act of writing.”⁴⁰

³⁶ I use the term “literary” here only to not further complicate the narrative. In reality, I do not believe that the term has any real meaning for what Zong Bing represented.

³⁷ Foong, *Efficacious Landscape*, p. 17.

³⁸ To “display” is how Susan Bush translates *mei*; Bush, “Tsong Ping’s Essay on Painting Landscape and the ‘Landscape Buddhism’ of Mt. Lu,” in Bush and Murck, eds., *Theories of the Arts in China*, p. 145.

³⁹ Yan Kejun, *Quan Song wen* 全宋文 (Beijing: Shangwu, 1999) 20, p. 2545: 玄牝之靈, 皆可得之於一圖矣。

⁴⁰ Matthias Obert, “Chinese Ink Brush Writing, Body Mimesis, and Responsiveness,” *Dao* 12 (2013), p. 533.

Paradigms such as a shared domain between body and cosmos have an important implication, not taken all too seriously by modern minds, namely the difficulty for fourth or fifth century Chinese to perceive the world as exclusively (and objectively) external, and even harder to grasp for premodern cultures, the related difficulty of thinking about mind as something radically internal and autonomous. Charles Taylor, in his work on secularism, has coined the term “buffered self” for this bounded, modern interiority, and contrasts it with a “porous self” of the premodern West, where the external world can impinge its own meaning upon us.⁴¹ If Taylor had considered Chinese examples, he could have gone further and found forms of interiority that are not simply “porous” but fundamentally open – a body whose interior is open to the interior of other bodies, human or cosmic.

Thus, here I am not talking about simply an alternative relation between the two categories – mind (interior) and landscape (exterior). Rather than adhering to the Eurocentric model of cognitive functions in the brain (or, mind) that grasp the reality of the world around it, traditional Chinese conceptions of interiority seem not to be limited to the brain, or even isolated within it. I have recently argued for the need to consider the Daoist modes of perception, when we discuss the way humans relate(d) to the world, namely in terms of the human body. Following ideas of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, this is how I put it:

From the vantage point of that body, we recognize the world on bodily terms. Concepts like “being,” “space,” “movement,” and so on, can only be understood because we are bodily “beings,” because we occupy bodily “space,” because our bodies “move,” and due to the time-cycles of our body (menstruation, fetal development, metabolism, aging). These fundamental concepts, intrinsically meaningful for human beings, are thus not to be understood as if they were produced by the thinking mind, but rather in their sense of existing as a shared domain between the human body and its world – it is the body that “knows” these concepts.⁴²

Although we may not need to exclude the possibility that medieval or premodern Chinese were subjects who saw objects, it is necessary to include the idea of shared interiority as an important analytical framework – one that has long prevailed within Daoist conceptions of the world.

⁴¹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 2007), pp. 27–42.

⁴² Meulenbeld, “Daoist Modes of Perception,” p. 42.

The inner/outer dichotomy, however, has become the dominant modern paradigm, along with its requirement to believe in objective reality. Scholars rarely question it, even when they intend to compare Chinese and Western modes of seeing the world. In a widely respected work entitled *Images of the Mind*, the eminent art historian Wen Fong seems at first to follow the propositions articulated by painters like Zong Bing, especially when he discusses the concept of “breath-resonance” (氣韻 *qiyun*) – a concept that signifies a commonality or even a continuum between the painter and the painted phenomenon. As he prefaces his discussion: “The painter’s goal was to participate in the dynamic energies and transformations of creation, rather than to fashion a mere counterfeit of nature.” But the point Wen Fong wants to make here is against Eurocentric assumptions about artistic traditions as universally evolving through a trajectory that includes some sort of realism, or at least the skill to produce an objective description of nature. Instead, Wen Fong continues, Chinese art was much more complicated. Although “painting must invoke and capture reality,” it should be seen as demonstrating “self-expression rather than objective representation;” it should reveal “a profundity of thought and taste wholly expressive of the artist’s inner self.”⁴³

Despite the innovative strength of Wen Fong’s interpretive instinct, which drives him away from certain Eurocentric paradigms, his basic presuppositions remain wedded to them. As soon as we read “self-expression,” “thought,” and “inner self,” we know immediately that Wen Fong’s usage of the “dynamic energies ... of creation” as formulated by “breath-resonance” cannot be consistent with the Daoist idea of tapping into impersonal and very real cosmogonic powers (probably not with the “neo-Confucian” idea either). Even though Wen Fong’s divorce from modern paradigms is astute, his subsequent analysis largely forms another parallel with the modern reverence for individual artistic expression in its genius rendering of objective reality: although the basic ingredients are rooted in the observable world, what matters is the individual artist’s innovative representation of it. Wen Fong interprets it as the way a painter could transfer “the personal, individual quality of the artist” to his work. Thus, the artist produces a uniquely individual version of reality, a view from the autonomously artistic “inner self.”

When Wen Fong discusses the famous “mountains and water” painter Guo Xi’s 郭熙 (after 1000–ca. 1090) engagement with Daoist

⁴³ Wen C. Fong, *Images of the Mind: Selections from the Edward L. Elliott Family and John B. Elliott Collections of Calligraphy and Painting at the Art Museum, Princeton University* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1984), pp. 4–5.

cultivation techniques, who, according to Wen, supposedly intended rather un-Daoistically “to exert control over nature,” he imposes this sort of individualized creativity: “In creating a macrocosmic vision of the universe, [Guo Xi] became, for the moment of his creative expression, coequal with Creation itself.”⁴⁴ What Guo Xi is said to have done here, rather godlike, is to paint a “creative expression” of himself, an act that is on a par with “Creation itself.” Though told with poetic grandeur, this story of a divinely creative artist whose unique interiority inspires him to paint great works of art still remains one of a subject producing an object.⁴⁵ This is not to blame Wen Fong, whose scholarship is exemplary and remains important; it is to show the difficulty of thinking outside of modern presuppositions even for those who set out to challenge them.

Individual artistic imagination, according to this logic, becomes reified as the highest achievement of the inner self, set apart from the ordinary objectivity of an outside world. Of course, as noted by scholars working on the Daoist aspects of “mountains and water” painting, it was precisely Guo Xi and his son Guo Si 郭思 (*js.* 1082), who explicitly worked with the homology between human body and “mountains and water.” In their work *Lofty Message of Forests and Springs* (*Linquan Gaozhi* 林泉高致) they stipulate this homology in great detail, nowhere hinting at any categorical distinction between “mind” and world.⁴⁶

It is hard to discuss early Chinese conceptions of mind without taking into account Buddhism, especially when brought into dialogue

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁴⁵ In some ways, Wen Fong seems to argue the opposite in another book, *Beyond Representation*, saying that late-imperial painters sought not to depict objective reality, but subjective inner expression. Yet, once more, such an argument is merely a different weighting of the same categories. Despite the book’s promising title, it perpetuates the universality of the modern dichotomy: “Looking to nature [the Chinese painter] carefully studied the world around him, and looking to himself he sought his own response to nature. The interactive relationship between the two, as expressed by the term *wai/chung*, ‘outer/inner’ or ‘exterior/interior,’ is circular and dynamic; as the artist sought to describe the external truth of the universe, he discovered at the same time an internal psychological truth.” It seems we must agree that if the reality of “world” and of “universe” is “external,” then surely the “inner” aspects of the human being can only be mental (“psychological”). It would be unfair to impugn Wen Fong for this subconscious perpetuation of modern presuppositions, or the uncritical usage of “nature” as if it meant the same for premodern Chinese painters and for us moderns. But it is time for his successors to critically examine the extent to which Eurocentric conventions have distorted proper understanding of Chinese paintings – and even of Chinese “art” more broadly speaking, no longer projecting this romantic category back into any time or place; Wen Fong, *Beyond Representation: Chinese Painting and Calligraphy, 8th-14th Century* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992), p. 76.

⁴⁶ See Susan Huang, *Picturing True Form: Daoist Visual Culture in Traditional China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2012), pp. 77–80.

with Zong Bing's seminal ideas. In a recent work on literary descriptions of "the world" that similarly reveals the difficulty encountered in an attempt to move away from Eurocentric categories, Tian Xiaofei uses several Buddhist notions to discuss the mind. Perhaps unwittingly, her starting point is modern, as she begins to explore representations of "mountains and water" with a chapter on landscape poetry ominously entitled "Seeing with the Mind's Eye." Her book's opening sentence sharply draws the very Cartesian line that differentiates between a subject with interiorized thinking and a surrounding world of external objects: "This chapter explores a series of acts of the mind in its interaction with the physical world, or more specifically, with landscape (*shanshui*, "mountains and waters") during the ... Eastern Jin."⁴⁷ In thus separating the subjective "mind" from the objective physical world, she projects the modern exclusivity of the autonomous mind back into the Chinese worldview of the Eastern Jin.

On the basis of such presuppositions, Tian Xiaofei analyses Zong Bing's articulations of "mountains and water" painting in a different way, largely contradicting his statement about obtaining numinous energy from the picture. Although she recognizes the cultural paradigm of using paintings for meditative visualization, thereby allowing the spirit to embark on journeys to faraway places, her narrative is predicated upon the Cartesian duality. This compels her to remark that spiritual journeys are "conducted with one's spirit, not with one's body."⁴⁸ This primacy of the spiritual/mental is reproduced on a larger scale in the context of "mountains and water," where she states that "imaginary landscape and painted landscape are just as real as physical landscape, because physical landscape is transient and illusory."⁴⁹ In this reading, if taken to its logical conclusion, nothing can ever be real. Thus saying that all reality is subjective, it is a mere inversion of the assumption that all we can observe is objective reality. While Tian, too, intends to challenge a pillar of the modern worldview (empirical reality), its basic diametrical categories remain unchallenged.

To drive home the difficulty of disentanglement from modern habits of the heart, this subjective reality also points to Tian Xiaofei's reading of thought and visualization as encompassing an exclusively mental process based upon Buddhist practices, which, if one adheres to the ideals expressed through certain normative readings, take place

⁴⁷ Tian Xiaofei, *Visionary Journeys: Travel Writings from Early Medieval and Nineteenth-Century China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 2012), p. 21.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

in the mind. It is a kind of exclusivist reading similar to what Donald Lopez has ironically described as the “laboratory of the mind” that was construed – not coincidentally – within nineteenth-century formulations of “scientific Buddhism.”⁵⁰ Tian argues succinctly for both the exclusivity and the primacy of the mind when she discusses the act of contemplative visualization (觀想 *guanxiang*): “The importance of *guanxiang* lies with the belief that visualization *is* realization. In other words, the Buddha himself is no more than a product of one’s mind, a figment of the imagination.”⁵¹ Again, objective reality is here denied by equating it to visualization as an exclusively mental act. Here I do not simply want to point out the paradox that on the basis of equating visualization with realization one could also argue the opposite, namely that “a product of one’s mind” might just as well represent something very real and tangible, or that even figments of the imagination may end up becoming very real and tangible. Though related, the issue at stake is one of conflation: the assumed equivalence of thought and visualization with “mind,” or with “imagination,” and thus with the interior as if it were an exclusive realm. Ultimately, thus presenting the imaginary as more real than reality, the difficulty of escaping modern dualities remains extraordinary.

Perhaps, though, even if we draw primarily upon Buddhism as a theoretical guideline, the argument for this exclusivity of the mind cannot be made so plainly. Although the classic Buddhist analysis suggests that an “individual being’s physical and psychological make-up” is largely slanted towards the mental,⁵² it expressly is not separated categorically from the physical, and its mentality does nothing to privilege cognition. Not to mention the fact that it is precisely Buddhist theorization itself that *dissects* the experienced world into categories that allow for a superficial parallel with the Cartesian paradigm, thus suggesting that there was something more wholesome to be cut up in the first place.⁵³

As explained above, Eastern Jin times were characterized not only by the growing presence of Buddhism, but also by the predominance of Daoist ideas of visualization. In the latter, thought is not as exclusively mental as the modern paradigm assumes. Michael Puett has made a

⁵⁰ Donald Lopez, Jr., *The Scientific Buddha: His Short and Happy Life* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 2012).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁵² Rupert Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1998), p. 31.

⁵³ Though I am not a specialist of medieval Buddhism, I nonetheless suspect that the Buddhist mind of that time also should not be conflated with our modern idea of the mind.

convincing argument that the Daoist adept's visualization techniques of this period were meant, among other things, both for "nourishing spirits within himself" and, literally, for becoming "a microcosm of the cosmos."⁵⁴ Mind, moreover, is not a clearly delimited category at all. Journeys made by the mind are not so easily distinguishable from physical existence: to repeat Robinet, "spirits take physical form and bodies take spiritual form." The point of arguing against the Cartesian paradigm is thus not to deny reality, but to deny the plausibility that premodern Chinese unequivocally operated on the proposition of an empirically observable and radically external world of physical objects. At least in the Daoist analysis, the boundaries between spirit and matter are not absolute; mind is not an isolated entity that relates to the world only through cognition.

In Daoist practices of that time, to imagine or to visualize hardly meant something purely mental – if such a concept existed at all. Take, for example, the instructions for the Daoist priest's presentation of a written petition to the celestial abode. Roughly from the late Han or early Jin, it is formulated as a process of *cunsi* 存思. This term has been translated as "visualization," but that can be used in a sense clearly not disconnected from tangible presences. The term *cun* 存, for starters, does not literally mean visualization at all, but rather "to preserve," "to exist," and even to "actualize." The priest executes these procedures *within* himself, but since the inner world is a version of the outer world, they are not categorically separate. In fact, the priest's journey can only be undertaken because in his ritual "actualization" (*cun*) he *exteriorizes* 出 (*chu*) red pneumas 赤紅炁 from his heart, crystalizing into a version of himself that rises up to Heaven.⁵⁵ Similarly, another (earlier) version of this ritual is called the Exteriorization of Officers 出官 for the presentation of petitions to Heaven.⁵⁶ This, too, is a ritual of "summoning forth the deities from within the body of the priest."⁵⁷ If the interior of the body contains phenomena that can be called forth, the assumption of an absolute difference between a bodily inner Heaven and a physical outer Heaven becomes illogical. In other words, if we are to understand a Jin dynasty observer's perception of

⁵⁴ Michael Puett, "Becoming Laozi: Cultivating and Visualizing Spirits in Early-Medieval China," *AM* 3d ser. 23.1 (2010), pp. 223–52.

⁵⁵ Terry Kleeman, *Celestial Masters: History and Ritual in Early Daoist Communities* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2016), pp. 366–67.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 285–87.

⁵⁷ Maruyama Hiroshi, entry "Chushen," in Fabrizio Pregadio, ed., *Encyclopedia of Daoism* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 282.

a “mountains and water” painting, we had better question the modern dogma of exclusive interiority.

Let me conclude this section by preparing a pathway towards the Ming and its “mountains and water” paintings. All the aforementioned spiritual/physical phenomena of the inner/outer cosmos were not taken to be just mental images, nor a collection of physical objects; they were nodes for the transmission of cosmic energies. In line with Sivin’s characterization of body and world, Ming-era texts from the Daoist Canon make the dynamic link an explicit issue that revolves around energy or pneuma (*qi*) and its effects: “A human being and the cosmos have equal bodies (均體 *junti*) and identical *qi*. That is called ‘being able to unite with Heaven and Earth and assist in their transforming and nourishing.’”⁵⁸ Aside from the explicit interpenetration of the two realms, note that the idea of an “equal body” also applied to the cosmos.

Implied in this schema is interiority: the human body holds a world; the cosmos is also a body, holding a bigger world. An interior is shared between the two. Daoist discourses make clear that the body-cosmos as talked of during the Ming dynasty was conceived to be a world unto itself, literally with mountains, streams, oceans, thunder, rain, and so on, all the way down to things like temples and pagodas. Kristofer Schipper has illuminated this aspect of the Daoist body at length.⁵⁹ Conceptually speaking, the basic elements corresponded to a landscape, or a painting of it, precisely in its articulation as a realm of “mountains and water.”⁶⁰ For example, in a longer and much more detailed description of the bodily cosmos, one early-Ming manual for Daoist ritual concisely defines the body just in those terms: “My body, then, is a great land of mountains and rivers; nothing is lacking.”⁶¹

In the most widespread conceptualization of this world, the head (or parts thereof) is understood as Mount Kunlun 崑崙, the famous mythical mountain and gateway to transcendence.⁶² This is certainly

⁵⁸ *Daofa huiyuan* 道法會元 (DZ 1220), j. 70, p. 14a: 人與天地均體同氣, 是可以參天地而贊化育也。This language is taken from – or in reference to – the Confucian *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhongyong* 中庸), chap. 22: 能盡物之性、則可以贊天地之化育。可以贊天地之化育、則可以與天地參矣。

⁵⁹ Kristofer Schipper, *The Taoist Body*, trans. Karen Duval (1983; Berkeley: U. California P., 1994).

⁶⁰ Susan Huang has devoted a section of her book to this topic; *Picturing the True Form*, pp. 78–85. Also see the recent work by Anna Hennessey, “Chinese Images of Body and Landscape: Visualization and Representation in the Religious Experience of Medieval China,” Ph.D. diss. (U. California, Santa Barbara, 2011). Hennessey proffers the notion that landscape paintings were also used as “political instruments” and “tools of ideology” (p. 68). She sees this within the project of “appropriating the sacred space of mountains” (p. 80).

⁶¹ *Daofa huiyuan* 69, p. 25a: 吾身便是大地山河, 無所不備矣。Also see pp. 23b–24a.

⁶² See Huang’s examples in *Picturing the True Form*, pp. 78–80.

the body-scape that appears in Ming-era ritual manuals, and afterwards too. For example, a fourteenth-century Daoist manual provides a long description of what it calls the “body-cosmos 身中天地,” which starts by saying that “the top [of the head] is Mount Kunlun 頂爲崑崙.”⁶³ Another text from the same collection says that “the head is Kunlun 頭爲崑崙.”⁶⁴ A recently discovered manual of Daoist ritual from 1697 shows the universal body of Lao Zi, locating Kunlun at the back of his head (see figure 2).

From the Ming-dynasty period onwards, the issue of interiority in relation to the bodily cosmos came to play a role at key junctures. So much so, that at first sight it seems as if mainstream Daoist ritual underwent an explicit turn towards the same type of interiority that the European Protestants developed in their disavowal of ritual performance – and which helped prepare the way for Descartes’ *cogito*. For example, Zhao Yizhen 趙宜真 (?–1382), an influential patriarch of the Pure Tenuity (Qingwei 清微) school of ritual that became predominant during the Ming, emphasized the importance of inner cultivation, stating its primacy independent of ritual procedures. Yet, the interiority of this Daoist body is very different from that of the cognitive “mind” (or from an inner dialogue with the Protestant God) and its separation from the external world. Zhao Yizhen defined the human body as a microcosmos that has primacy over the macrocosmos.

Heaven and Earth are a large cosmos, the human body is a small cosmos. If my heart is upright, then the heart of the [macro-] cosmos will also be upright. If my energies (*qi*) are orderly, then the energies of the [macro-] cosmos will also be orderly. Therefore, the miracle of Pure Tenuity prayers are that creative transformations are based upon my body, not upon ascending [the ritual space].⁶⁵ 天地大天地，人身小天地。我之心正，則天地之心亦正。我之氣順，則天地之氣亦順矣。故清微祈禱之妙，造化在吾身中，而不在乎登。

In its basic outline, the individual body’s direct, inner access to the most sacred principle of the universe (that is, “creative transformations 造化”), is quite reminiscent of the personal relationship with God by which the Reformists sought to forego the mediation of Catholic ritual. Yet, in the Ming-period’s Daoist vision there remains an absolute openness of the body’s interior to the body’s exterior, and the outside world is open to impact from the interior. Significantly, in its

⁶³ *Daofa huiyuan* 98, p. 12a; similar to *j.* 84, 89, and 119.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 244, p. 13a.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 8, p. 2b.

acting upon the world, the body requires no mediation from tools or even limbs: the interior and the exterior are in direct communication. These ritualists intended to achieve this not primarily by means of their bodily actions, but through the realization of their body as landscape of mountains and water, the body-scape.

Having liberated the human body from its empirical physicality, and realigned it with the body of the landscape, this process is thus attained by transcending the socially determined individuality of humans; it allows the human body to share in the cosmic pattern of bodies like that of Mount Kunlun. It is one aspect of what Daoists mean when they use the term *xian* 仙, “transcendence,” for the state they strive to attain when visualizing their inner landscape.⁶⁶ The Daoist techniques of cultivation – whether conceived as visualization, meditation, inner alchemy, or the amalgam it normally forms – are played out in that shared interiority. In that sense, of course, Daoist transcendence is deeply immanent.

SEEING BEYOND THE SURFACE

Let us descend from the transcendental heights of Mount Kunlun to the mortal grounds on which late-Ming and early-Qing painters worked, particularly those of the flourishing region of Jiangnan.

The connection between these seemingly disconnected realms is made quite explicitly by Xu Xiake 徐霞客 (1586–1641). Though now famous mostly for his travelogues (遊記 *youji*), his contemporaries would have known him primarily as a “shape expert (形家 *xingjia*),” trained to recognize “earthly patterns” (地理 *dili*). In his writings, Xu very pointedly related the “objective” world of Jiangnan to the sacred geography of the transcendental mountains that embodied terrestrial flows of energy, and was embodied by the massive subterranean Southern Dragon (南龍 *Nanlong*). All throughout his travels, he considered mountains not in isolation but as part of a longer chain (a “dragon ridge” or “dragon vein 龍脈,” but also “dragon spine 龍脊,” and thus part of a *fengshui* 風水 configuration along which flowed living breath (氣 *qi*).⁶⁷ In his words, “The Southern Dragon pervades half of our world. As its vein also springs from Mount Kunlun, it connects to the Gold Dust River

⁶⁶ My usage of “transcendent” for *xian* 仙/僊 instead of the also common “immortal,” later on in this article, is furthermore based upon the excellent justification given in Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, pp. 21–23.

⁶⁷ Julian Ward, *Xu Xiake (1586–1641): The Art of Travel Writing* (London: Curzon, 2000), p. 164.

(upper stretch of the Yangzi) and reaches southwards...⁶⁸ Thus, even if we leave our transcendental realm to dwell on earth, we still find a connection to Kunlun.

Such perceptions of the world as a multidimensional body with a spine and veins were not limited to specialists of “earthly patterns” like Xu Xiake. Other literati found their world configured along the same lines. Take Gu Qiyuan 顧起元 (1565–1628), a contemporary of Xu Xiake from the same broad region. In a piece entitled “Mountains and Water” (“Shanshui” 山水), he starts thus: “As for the mountains of Jinling (Nanjing), the shape-experts say that it is the place where the Southern Dragon reaches its end. With its flourishing essence of *qi*, it reveals itself entirely.”⁶⁹ Gu refers here to specific views of Nanjing lying at one end of the Southern Dragon, namely its head. Though not a “shape-expert,” for Gu Qiyuan as well, mountains literally embodied a power not objectively observable but that was, nonetheless, very tangibly real and alive. Indeed, although the presence of a dragon may lie in the eye of the beholder, the reality of such powerful presences will be immediately intuited by anyone who has ever climbed a mountain.

With earthly patterns (*dili*) thus not to be understood in the secular sense of geography, they can expose different possibilities of perceiving the landscape. Exemplary of the alternative modes of perception that Ming-Qing “mountains and water” painting reveals, Wang Jianzhang’s painting *Traveling in a Snowy Landscape* (*Xueshan xinglü* 雪山行旅, better translated as “Traveling in Snowy Mountains”), dated 1633, provides much to think about.⁷⁰ What would strike most observers about this “mountains and water” vista is the way the mountains rise up with linear steepness, somewhat similar to the stalagmites one finds growing on the ground of some grottoes. But, in contrast to stalagmites, which form over long periods of time by water that drips from above, Wang Jianzhang’s mountains rather seem to have been propelled upwards from below. (See figure 3.) There is even something crystalline about them, recalling the shape of quartz crystals extending themselves upward in straight lines – literally *growing*, not from without but from within. It is our first hint about the landscape’s interiority.

And there is more to be considered here, very much on the level of the painter’s intentional design. In addition to Wang Jianzhang’s con-

⁶⁸ 惟南龍磅礴半宇內，而其脈亦發於崑崙，與金沙江相持南下。See Xu Xiake 徐霞客, *Xu Xiake youji* 徐霞客遊記 (SKQS edn.; Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1993), vol. 1129.

⁶⁹ Gu Qiyuan 顧起元, *Kezuo zhuiyu* 客座贅語 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), p. 311: 金陵之山，形家言爲南龍盡處，精華之氣，發露無餘。

⁷⁰ Little, ed., *17th-Century Chinese Paintings*, cat. no. 63, pp. 392–93.

ceiving these mountains along strictly perpendicular lines, he endowed them with a consistent pattern of repetition. In the first place, this is visible throughout their slender verticality, where softer lines are added along the surface of the peaks. But more clearly, each of their sharp lines is reverberating with the lines of other peaks; they form a coherent whole of similar shapes. Stephen Little refers to this as a “geometrical structure” of “parallel lines.”⁷¹ We encounter, truly, a pattern.

Such perfect (as Little calls them) “angularization of shapes” is rarely, if ever, manifested in real mountain peaks, nor is the repetitiveness of what he calls their “linear quality.”⁷² Furthermore, their top-heavy appearance, with something like a head frequently bulging out from the upper part, is a phenomenon one is even less likely to find in nature. What the mushrooming heads purposefully suggest is a growth from within. Combined with their patterned design, the artist does not seem to envision his mountains as an empirically observable landscape.⁷³

The basic outlines of Wang Jianzhang’s patterned peaks are conceived in a way similar to a famous painting – entitled *Picture of Mount Kuanglu* (*Kuanglu tu* 匡廬圖) – attributed to the late-ninth-century painter Jing Hao 荆浩.⁷⁴ In a famous essay by Jing on the multidimensionality of brushwork, he explains the shapes of painted mountains precisely in terms of inner forces: “In images of mountains and water, *qi* and its directionality give rise to each other.”⁷⁵ Recall here how, in early-medieval times, the efficacy of “mountains and water” was also conceived in terms of an image.

Looking at the painted shapes of other Chinese “mountains and water” paintings, we can easily see that artists were not so much preoccupied with the accurate representation of visible reality. A work such as *Winter Landscape* (*Xuehan shanshuitu* 雪寒山水圖, literally “Painting of Mountains and Water in Cold Snow”) by Fan Qi 樊圻 (1611–after 1697), one of the Eight Masters of Nanjing, illustrates this (see figure 4). Painted in 1666, the mountainous landscape engages the eye in a way that starkly contrasts with any landscape we might encounter outside under normal circumstances. In their archaistic reminiscence of

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 392

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ That is, nonetheless, with the notable exception of Wuyishan 武夷山 / 武彝山, where such shapes can be found on a very modest scale.

⁷⁴ This painting is kept in the National Palace Museum, Taipei; accession number 000817N000000000.

⁷⁵ Jing Hao 荆浩, *Bifaji* 筆法記, p. 6. In Lu Fusheng 盧輔聖 (ed.), *Zhongguo shuhua quan-shu* 中國書畫全書, Vol. 1: 山水之象, 氣勢相生

Tang-era “mountains and water” paintings, the mountains almost vibrate with “geometric repetitions of overlapping triangular forms and with formulaic and striking contrasts.”⁷⁶ Though very different from Wang Jianzhang’s multiplicity of emaciated peaks, much more compact and less edgy or towering, their shapes are nonetheless similarly coherent, formulaic indeed. Fan Qi’s mountains recall the modular repetition one finds in many species of corals, or in fossilized objects like mammoth’s teeth or certain ammonites. Far from being a realistic depiction of a given landscape, these repetitions reveal a world patterned by the underlying forces of the cosmos, the sacred principles of growth that undulate through it. This vibrant “mountains and water” painting of snow and stone, moreover, is accessible – a pathway leads up to an open door. In what seems to be an explicit invitation to recognize an inner space, we can enter and partake of it. Both Fan Qi’s and Wang Jianzhang’s snowy “mountains and water” paintings feature the detail of accessibility.

This idea, too, is long known from earlier painters. Again quoting from the eleventh-century court painter Guo Xi and his son Guo Si, the best “mountains and water” painting is one which the artist has purposefully made suitable for “dwelling and roaming 可居可遊.”⁷⁷ They maintain that for painter and onlooker alike, this is the “basic meaning 本意” of such paintings! (See the comparative set of figures 5 and 6.)

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON THE SURFACE

If our modern eyes have a hard time avoiding the deeply habitual drive to look for objective reality (or the divergence from it), the inverse is true of Chinese observers when they encountered European paintings during the sixteenth century. It is not so much that they could not see the objective reality depicted in portraits brought to them by Jesuit missionaries, but clearly they were not accustomed to it; European painting literally opened up an unfamiliar perspective.

This period, during the mid- to late-Ming dynasty, was the time when painters like Wang Jianzhang were active, and Fan Qi, a few decades later. Relatively more famous contemporaries were, for example, Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555–1636) and Song Maojin 宋懋晉 (1559?–1622?), both of whom we will encounter in the social circles of an author who wrote about the accessibility of painted landscapes.

⁷⁶ Little, ed., *17th-Century Chinese Paintings*, cat. no. 76, p. 434.

⁷⁷ Guo Xi 郭熙 and Guo Si 郭思, *Linquan gaozhi* 林泉高致, in Lu Fusheng 盧輔聖, ed., *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu* 中國書畫全書 (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua, 1993), vol. 1, p. 497.

It was also a time when literati from the very circles of these painters wrote stories about encountering the European mode of realism in painting. The response by these literati is enshrined in the stories they wrote, describing Chinese observers who were extremely impressed when seeing European art of that period. From these records we can see how the very idea of realism became an issue from the moment the Chinese encountered it in Western art. Their surprised response tells us something about the relative unfamiliarity they felt with the idea of depicting the world in terms of exact realism. Indeed, their surprise corroborates my argument that there existed other ways of looking at pictures, radically different from the modern, Western perception of painting that merely sees objects as they are depicted and that focuses on the world as if it is only to be empirically observed.

Several stories exist of this clash of visual cultures, with Chinese literati marveling at the religious iconography brought by the famous Jesuit priest Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), an Italian who established the Christian missionary project in China by essentially becoming, much due to his costume and teaching agenda, closely associated in the eyes of his Chinese associates with their own literati. One of those stories is narrated by Gu Qiyuan, who we have seen describing the mountains around Nanjing in terms of the Southern Dragon. Published shortly after 1600, it describes Matteo Ricci's explanations regarding the aspects in which Chinese observers found Italian painters to be particularly awe inspiring. It is important to remember that Ricci's mission there coincided with the culmination of the Italian *chiaroscuro* style, perfected by painters such as Caravaggio (1571–1610). This dramatic style of “brightness and shadow” clearly informed the way in which Ricci framed his discussion of the art of painting in both Italy and China.

After a brief introduction, the story describes an image of the “Heavenly Lord” in Christianity, Jesus Christ, and the way he is painted on Matteo Ricci's religious icons. It is important to realize that by the late-sixteenth century these icons had long come to be expressed in a style that foreshadowed *chiaroscuro*, as can be seen in a painting like the *Virgin and Child* by Dieric Bouts (active by 1457–d. 1475).⁷⁸ Even in an etching depicting Matteo Ricci and his Chinese collaborator Xu Guangqi 徐光啓 (see figure 7, below), a similar icon is visible. The narrative has Ricci explaining Italian painting in those exact terms of *chiaroscuro*.

⁷⁸ See the painting in Metropolitan Museum of Art., acc. no. 30.95.280.

The Heavenly Lord they paint is, in fact, a little child. A woman holds him; she is called Heavenly Mother. The painting is mounted on a bronze tablet, with the whole spectrum of colors applied to it. Their appearance is life-like, their bodies and arms neatly arranged on the mounting, inexplicably sticking out. If you look at the receding and protruding parts of their faces from up front, they are no different from living people. When he was asked how painting could attain such skill, Matteo Ricci answered: "In Chinese paintings only the [bright] *yang* aspect is painted, not the [obscure] *yin*.⁷⁹ Thus, if you look at people's faces or bodies they are straight and flat, images without any receding or protruding parts. In my country both the [obscure] *yin* and the [bright] *yang* are painted, therefore faces have taller and deeper parts, and arms always have roundness. When the appearance of people faces the brightness [*yang*], then they are entirely lit and white. But when they face it sideways, then the side that faces the light is white, whereas the side that does not face the light, including the eyes, ears, nose, mouth and receding parts all are represented in obscurity. Those in my country who paint images understand this method, and thus they can paint images that are no different from living people."⁸⁰

所畫天主，乃一小兒，一婦人抱之，曰“天母”。畫以銅板爲登，而塗五采於上，其貌如生，身與臂手儼然隱起登上，臉之凹凸處，正視與生人不殊。人問畫何以致此，答曰：“中國畫但畫陽，不畫陰，故看之人面軀正平，無凹凸相。吾國畫兼陰與陽寫之，故面有高下，而手臂皆輪圓耳。凡人之面，正迎陽，則皆明而白，若側立，則向明一邊者白，其不向明一邊者，眼、耳、鼻、口、凹處皆有暗相。吾國之寫像者解此法，用之故能使畫像與生人亡異也。”

What Ricci elucidates here is the *appearance* of depicted figures. His perception dwells entirely in the realm of what it takes to accurately paint an observable reality. Gu Qiyuan iterates exactly his admiration for the fact that the human shapes on the painting appeared “no different from living people.”

Ricci's spectacle of lifelike icons apparently struck the Chinese as so uncommon that a similar story was told by a figure who frequented the social circles of an adjacent region, that of Suzhou, the home of painters like the aforementioned Dong Qichang, Song Maojin, and others. This relatively unknown figure, Qian Xiyan 錢希言, was also active during the same time. In a story from 1613 that similarly treats the vari-

⁷⁹ Assuming that these words do echo Matteo Ricci's personal explanations, perhaps even originate from him directly, then he doubtlessly is referring to the technique of chiaroscuro as refined by late-16th-c. painters like Caravaggio.

⁸⁰ Gu, *Kezuo zhuiyu*, pp. 193-94.

ous technicalities of Ricci's painted icons of Jesus Christ and the Holy Virgin, he narrates in a piece titled "Li Madou [Matteo Ricci]" 利瑪竇: "The image of the woman is like the Queen Mother of the West, but the colors of the drawing are splendid and extraordinary. Looking at it is like the precious adornment of the [Buddhist] 'Seven Treasures.'" ⁸¹ If this sort of reverent description is not enough to attest to the admiration these men felt for Italian painting, Qian Xiyan further states how the Chinese responded to this style of iconography by contrasting it to their own art. Rating it superior to Chinese painting, they say that "Chinese craft does not attain such skill". ⁸² What we witness in such statements, apparently, is the power of the empirical paradigm of realism, which thrust Chinese painting into the early-modern world at large.

Underneath the surface, however, other assumptions decidedly resist the intrusion of new perspectives. Qian Xiyan's story from 1613 goes further than the first in illustrating the inescapable habits of the Chinese heart when viewing a painting, even when confronted with the power of lifelike realism. From the painting, Qian says, Chinese observers read the presence of hidden forces. First, the Holy Virgin's appearance is likened to that of the Queen Mother of the West (*Xi-wang Mu* 西王母), who by Ming times had come to be known largely as a Daoist goddess of immortality. In itself, this analogy remains well within the scope that the Jesuit icon represents as an object: the depiction of a sacred being.

The story, however, treads far beyond superficial similarities between two sacred beings. Its last lines reveal that Chinese veneration for Matteo Ricci was such that they even suspected him to be deeply versed in Daoism, but remarking that it was *only when* Ricci died from a common disease and was unable to cure himself, that people "started to realize that he did not possess any other Daoist skills." ⁸³ And if Ricci was not able to avoid his own death, in late-Ming thinking he clearly could not possess the Daoist skills of infusing things with the forces of life. This sort of attribution of Daoist skills, often alchemical, was not an uncommon response to various exotic talents of the Jesuits in the late-sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. ⁸⁴ Be it noted, moreover, that this

⁸¹ This is in Qian Xiyan, *Kuaiyuan* 繪園 (1613; 1823 rpt. of 1774 edn.; carried in *Zhibuzhu zhai* 知不足齋 publishing house and available via the digital archives of Bayerische Staatsbibliothek) 4, p. 28a: "婦人像若西王母, 而繪彩之色絢爛非常, 望若七寶莊嚴者。"

⁸² Ibid. 4, p. 28b: 中華所不及也。

⁸³ Ibid.: 始知其無他道術。

⁸⁴ See Yang Tingyun 楊廷筠, *Daiyi bianquan* 代疑編全, in Li Tiangang 李天綱, ed., *Ming-mo Tianzhujiao sanzhu shiwen jianzhu: Xu Li Yang lunjiao wenji* 明末天主教三柱石文箋注, 徐李楊論教文集 (Hong Kong: Daofeng shushe, 2007), p. 245. I am indebted to Chen Lang for bringing this source to my attention.

sort of “Daoist skills 道術” (also “magic”), was extraordinarily popular among the contemporary Confucian literati as well.⁸⁵ They, too, based their version of Daoist skills on a proper body-scape with mountains, occasionally revealing that they had studied with Daoist priests.⁸⁶

In other words: for the Chinese of the Ming dynasty no less than for those of the Eastern Jin, one conventional expectation regarding painted objects was that they should represent more than mere depicted shapes, that – in their skillfulness – they could be made “magically” to embody the efficacious forces of the relevant skills themselves.

LANDSCAPE AND COSMOS

“Mountains and water” paintings exemplify this fundamental, alternative Chinese view better than anything else. Above, I mentioned the way in which paintings of wintery landscapes by Wang Jianzhang and Fan Qi reveal a world of forms and shapes patterned by the sacred forces of the cosmos. Other landscapes may be painted in different styles, yet they reveal a similar concept. On the whole, in line with those wintery landscapes, conceptually painted “mountains and water” vistas are almost inherently at odds with realistic modes of representation. Another representative of Nanjing’s Eight Masters, Gong Xian 龔賢 (1620–1689), produced in 1674 a truly monumental mountainous landscape,⁸⁷ which also invokes the patterns of growth pervading the Chinese cosmos (see figure 8). Its cliffs and peaks seem to reverberate with each other, echo the shared force that engenders them in solidified form. It is consistently toned all throughout the painting, alternating effusions of dark and light, interchanging arrays of hard and soft, edgy and soothing, and so on. Through such polarity it captures the rhythms of the earth. Indeed, Gong Xian’s painting even comprises two distinct rhythmic patterns: the dominant curves of the rocks and mountains, as well as the more modest presence of trees that continuously reconstitute each other’s outlines. The trees again comprise three main modalities: big trees that produce repetitive patterns of pine leaves in the foreground, smaller trees that repeat the same angles of branches

⁸⁵ Willard Peterson, *Bitter Gourd: Fang I-chih and the Impetus for Intellectual Change* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1979), p. 137, and nn. 53–54 there.

⁸⁶ Wang Hongzhuan 王弘撰 (1622–1702), *Shanzhi* 山志 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1999), p. 124.

⁸⁷ I use the term monumental in its general sense of colossal and memorable, not in the loaded way it has come to be used in Chinese art history. See the debate between Wu Hung and Robert Bagley; Wu Hung, *Monumentality in Chinese Art and Architecture* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1995); and Robert Bagley, “Review of Monumentality in Chinese Art and Architecture by Wu Hung,” *HJAS* 58.1 (1998), pp. 221–56.

over and over again, and, finally, dotted plants (trees and shrubs) that endow most of the rocky shapes with a furry texture.

The landscape channels, through the appearance of patterned mountains, something beneath the outer manifestations, something that arises from within. Following Stephen Little, who remarks about this painting that the “rock faces sometimes seem lit from beneath,” the landscape itself dazzles with an inner light.⁸⁸ If this is not a vista that radiates with a latent power, what is?

Such highly patterned renderings of what supposedly constitutes an objective existence of landscape, point to an altogether different way of processing the image of the world we see before our eyes, not in the usual cognitive way. These seventeenth-century painters sought to reveal not reality as it presented itself to their sensory organs, but to make manifest the underlying principle whose forces pattern the world. Expressed through the different yet coherent patterns of single paintings, in each rendering they thus reveal a unifying principle. It is, as Gregory Bateson has termed it, a pattern which connects all patterns, a “metapattern.”⁸⁹

Given the relevance of Bateson’s idea for my analysis, but also its complexity, I cannot avoid a brief explanation here. Bateson sees in the formal connections between natural organisms a way to arrive at the structured unity that underlies the cosmos. He divides these formal patterns into three logical types: “first-order” connections (within one and the same body), such as those between an arm and a leg; “second-order” connections (between different bodies), such as the formal resemblance between the limbs of crabs and lobsters, or between those of humans and horses; and “third-order” connections (the formal pattern that allows for a comparison between the bodies of crabs/lobsters and humans/horses). This third order pattern, the highest, is what Bateson calls “the pattern which connects.”⁹⁰ Be it noted that he adds later that such unity constitutes a sanctification of the natural world and that “ultimate unity is *aesthetic*.”⁹¹

To return to “mountains and water painting” with Bateson in mind, if landscape can be viewed as a coherently arranged system of forms, the principle that endows it with its coherence, the “metapattern,”

⁸⁸ Little, *17th-Century Chinese Paintings*, cat. no. 70, p. 414.

⁸⁹ Gregory Bateson, *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity* (1979; Cresskill, N.J.: Hampton Press, 2002), p. 10.

⁹⁰ Although narrowly speaking Bateson explains this on pp. 9–11, it is more effective to read his entire introduction.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 16

should be observable in all phenomena that are governed by it. Indeed, to see the pattern that gives form to the human body as comparable to the pattern that gives form to landscapes, is exactly to see a formulation of a metapattern. Thus we find the theoretical relevance of the body-cosmos for understanding “mountains and water” painting. We can grasp the forces at work in a body’s interior by understanding their manifestations on the outside, and thereby realize these forces within ourselves.

THE NARRATIVE OF AN OPEN LANDSCAPE

Late-Ming narrative literature expresses the commonality of a metapattern shared between the human body and the body of the landscape as simply the permeability of their imagined boundaries. One story in particular serves an example. It is titled “The Boat on the Wall” 壁上船 (found in Qian’s 1613 collection titled *Kuaiyuan* 獮園 (*Garden of Cunning*), which, as we saw, was the source of Qian’s description of Matteo Ricci’s purported Daoist skills.⁹² The collection contains many narratives about objects like paintings, but also painted fans and gourds, each offering access to otherworldly realms. But more than that, it provides a comprehensive set of propositions that beautifully illustrates the particular gaze that people during the Ming would adopt when looking at paintings.

While Qian’s exact dates are unknown, we do know that he belonged to the cultured elite of Changshu – near present-day Shanghai – and had intimate ties to a broad range of famous figures of the time. For starters, he was distantly related to the famous Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582–1664), himself an avid consumer and producer of Buddhist-Daoist materials.⁹³ Moreover, several of Qian Xiyan’s associates were well known painters, people such as Dong Qichang, Song Maojin’s brother Song Maocheng 宋懋澄 (a trusted friend of Qian Xiyan), and Xu Wei 許渭. Even more significant is that several of the stories in *Kuaiyuan* cite some of these same famous men as their source.⁹⁴ In other words, the stories could claim direct narrative input from painters who belonged to the same social circles.

⁹² See fn. 81, above.

⁹³ Qian Xiyan was a distant cousin of Qian Qianyi, on whose religious world, see Lin Hsüeh-yi, “Qian Qianyi as a Buddhist in the Ming-Qing Transition,” *Journal of Chinese Buddhist Studies* 31 (2018), pp. 75–155.

⁹⁴ Yuan Yuan 袁媛, “Qian Xiyan ‘Kuaiyuan’ chengxian de wan Ming xiaoshuoquan” 錢希言獮園呈現的晚明小說圈, *Ming Qing xiaoshuo yanjiu* 89.3 (2008), pp. 266–79.

“The Boat on the Wall” is but one of many possible examples to elucidate the perception of paintings as having permeable boundaries. To prepare us for a proper reading of the story, we need to take seriously the way in which Qian classified it within his own collection, *Kuaiyuan*, by placing it in a category named “Xianhuan 仙幻,” which is *Kuaiyuan*’s first and largest category.⁹⁵ The term is difficult to translate, but we might make do with “immortals’ illusions,” or, in line with recent conventions to translate *xian* as “transcendent,” perhaps “transcendents’ artifices.”⁹⁶ It is a category that signifies Daoist content, referring to the popular image of Daoist practices as elusive in nature, often thought to have a certain mystique or deceptive enigma. Indeed, this category is akin to the “Daoist magic” observers suspected to be at work in Matteo Ricci’s painting. To drive this point home, the story “Li Madou,” about Ricci’s icon, is also rubricated under this same section. It effectively represents the rubric, since it told of Ricci’s painted icons being transcendent artifices.

Qian Xiyan locates “The Boat on the Wall” in Kuaiji, the region around Suzhou and Hangzhou; the time-period is the late-fifteenth century.

“The Boat on the Wall”

A certain Sir Mao from Kuaiji, in the possession of an imperial palace degree from around the Chenghua (1464–1487) and Hongzhi eras (1487–1505), had a penchant for the extraordinary. He liked the [Daoist] arts of Yellow and White,⁹⁷ of Expelling and Absorbing,⁹⁸ as well as Guiding and Pulling.⁹⁹ Although he resided at the Outer Censorate, he socialized day in day out with Daoists and their kind. After he became the surveillance commissioner of

⁹⁵ Qian Xiyan’s rubric of “transcendents’ artifices” contains another story with a similar plot as “Boat on the Wall”; it is named “The Transcendent with the Painted Fan” 畫扇仙人 (“Huashan xianren”). As with “Boat on the Wall,” a Daoist warns an eager scholar that his “transcendent’s bones are not yet complete 仙骨未成.”

⁹⁶ I am referring here mostly to Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures* (see n. 66, above), and Robert Campney, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth: A Translation and Study of Ge Hong’s Traditions of Divine Transcendents* (Berkeley: U. California P., 2002). To clarify, I do not believe that the term transcendence should exclude the possibility of immanence, but that is a discussion I hope to take up in a separate article.

⁹⁷ For a comprehensive survey of what these arts entail, see Chen Guofu 陳國符, *Zhongguo waidan huangbaifa kao* 中國外丹黃白法考 (Shanghai: Guji, 1997).

⁹⁸ See Henri Maspero, *Taoism and Chinese Religion*, trans. Frank Kierman (Amherst, Mass.: U. Massachusetts P., 1981), p. 341. Also see Campney, *To Live Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*, p. 81.

⁹⁹ See Maspero, *Taoism and Chinese Religion*, pp. 542–52; also Campney, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*, p. 82.

Guangdong province, he happened to examine some old files in the office. There was a case of a Daoist sorcerer who had spilled fire while cooking his elixir. When the fire spread to residential neighbourhoods, he was falsely accused [of criminal intent] and sentenced to death. Time had gone by quickly, almost twenty years. And when Sir Mao enquired after this man, it turned out that he was still in prison. Without delay, Sir Mao summoned him out to have a word with him; he was greatly pleased. Immediately they broke the man's shackles and invited him into the [office] building. The Daoist took out a dry pipe from his sleeve and drew a small boat on the wall. A figure on the boat had the posture of hoisting the sail. No one understood its meaning.

會稽毛公某，成宏間進士。性尚奇。好黃白、吐嚔、導引之術。雖居外臺，羽流道侶，日與周旋。爲廣東按察使時，偶檢司中舊文書。有一公案，是方士以煉丹失火。延燒民居，誣服論死。屈指歲月、將二十年矣。訊其人、尚在獄。亟召出與語、大悅。立破其械，延入內衙。出袖中枯管，畫一小船于壁上。一人作張帆狀，莫喻其旨也。

Sir Mao saw that, despite the Daoist's long time in prison, he didn't appear old at all. He thought this strange. At each [occasion] he increased his courtesies to the Daoist. From time to time he would ask the Daoist about the Great Way, but the Daoist persevered in unwillingness to speak about it. All he talked about were extraordinary stories of the realm of Jade Purity, the Purple Palace, [the Immortal Mountains of] Yingzhou, and the [transcendental gardens] of Xuanpu.¹⁰⁰ It seemed as if he had wandered through each and every one of those places. Once, he took out a wrap of herbs from the side of his robe as a gift to Sir Mao. First he put liquid silver [mercury] in a pot. After adding the herbs he lightly heated it. When [Sir Mao and others] inspected it after a short while, it had become splendid – solid silver! In his heart Sir Mao venerated him even more. Mao asked to receive the essentials of the recipe, but in the end he never could obtain them. The Daoist said: "Sir, you do not have the bones of a transcendent."¹⁰¹ As Mao insisted endlessly, the Daoist proceeded to the place where

¹⁰⁰ All these are "immortals' realms." Xuanpu is also a metaphor for Kunlun; see Huang, *Picturing the True Form*, p. 80.

¹⁰¹ When one metaphorically has the "bones of a transcendent" one is ready to tread towards transcendence. We may also take this more literally to mean "transcendental bones," i.e., the materiality of the body, the way it will obey gravity or be able to ascend. Here the phenomenological perspective is relevant, for which we might have the Daoist saying: "your thinking remains too much attached to the earthly realm, you cannot transcend your conventional expectations of what that 'essential' is."

he had drawn the boat, and shouted to the figures in the boat: "Set sail! Set sail!" Then the Daoist boarded the boat, hoisted the sail, and left. ... As they listened, they heard from within the wall only the sound of billowing great waves. Gradually they saw the corner of the sail reach the edge of the wall, dimly fading into vanishing. After a while, everything had disappeared from sight. The appearance of the wall was the same as before. ...

公見其在獄久，曾無老色。心異之。每加敬禮。時時叩以大道，固不肯言。所談者，皆玉清、紫宸、及瀛洲、元圃靈異之事。一一皆若經游。嘗從布袍角中藥一裹贈公。先以器盛水銀。投藥少許煎之。須臾發視，燦然成銀矣。公心益神之。詔受方要，亦終不能得。曰“相公無仙骨也。”逼之不已，乃詣畫船處，呼船中人曰：“開船、開船！”便登鷁首，揚帆而去。... 聽之，但聞壁間波濤澎湃聲。漸見帆角及檣杪，隱隱漸滅。良久都亡所見。壁色如舊矣。

Years later, the story concludes, Sir Mao met a stranger who asked him why he hadn't left together with the Daoist. It was at that moment that Sir Mao realized his mistake and went mad with grief. Soon after, he died.

The story treats a theme that can be found in Chinese classical stories of various epochs. Probably its most famous iteration is by Pu Songling 蒲松齡 (1640–1715), in his *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋誌異. Pu's reworking of the theme is titled "Hua bi" 畫壁 ("The Painted Wall"). It recounts a Buddhist temple visitor's being transported into a wall-painting, to become a part of the world depicted on it.¹⁰² Similarly as with the theme of "The Boat on the Wall," the narrator of "Painted Wall" explains the story as a missed opportunity to reach Buddhist enlightenment. Though an interpretation of it as an example of permeable boundaries is mentioned by some scholars, it is so far removed from Cartesian orthodoxy that most end up treating it as a form of literary play. They limit its relevance to the realm of the "rhetorical."¹⁰³

Yet, Pu Songling's story, like the one by Qian Xiyan, fits into a much older narrative tradition that goes against the understanding of image as mere representation, revealing it instead to be a presence that is accessible. Though not as well known, similar stories have been told even much earlier. For example, one from around 749 AD introduces a beautifully painted girl, ominously called Zhenzhen 真真, which means "Truly True" or "Really Real" – a playful reduplication that seems to unsettle the concept of reality itself. The painted girl is brought to life

¹⁰² Pu Songling 蒲松齡, *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋誌異 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1978), pp. 14–17.

¹⁰³ See Judith Zeitlin's discussion of walking in a painting; Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songling and the Chinese Classical Tale* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1997), p. 190.

through the relentless incantations and ritual consecrations executed by a young literatus who has fallen in love with her image. After she steps out of the painting she turns out to be a Daoist goddess; the young man ends up having a child with her. Although the dynamic of this painting is opposite to those that absorb their onlookers, the boundaries between the depicted goddess and the human being observing her are similarly permeable; it is an open painting.

Similar also to Qian Xiyan's classification used for "Boat on the Wall," the story of Zhenzhen is classified in the tenth-century *Extensive Records of the Taiping [Reign]* (太平廣記 *Taiping guangji*) under the rubric of "illusive arts 幻術."¹⁰⁴ This collection in fact contains stories about people, most often Daoists or Buddhists, who opened up their paintings for access to people of our world, or use it as a means for depicted souls to descend among us.¹⁰⁵ Other stories, classified under the heading "paintings 畫," reveal the real energies contained within painted depictions, such as an ink-painted lion who fights to rid a sick person of a disease,¹⁰⁶ or a woman who is possessed by a painting on a monastery wall, to be exorcised by a famous Daoist.¹⁰⁷ These narratives reveal an actual tradition of looking at paintings, a tradition that assumes the permeability of any apparent boundaries that might separate worldly realities from depicted realities. Most relevant, perhaps, as a precursor of "The Boat on the Wall," is the story in *Extensive Records* of the famous painter Wu Daozi 吳道子, who rejects the company of a Buddhist monk by drawing a donkey on a wall and disappearing with it into the picture.¹⁰⁸

Reception history demonstrates that these specific stories were taken to be relevant within the context of Daoist ritual, and not just as mere fiction for entertainment. For example, several of those just mentioned, from *Extensive Records*, are quoted literally – or otherwise referred to – in an early-Ming ritual manual that describes the way one should handle the brush (and oneself as well) when writing Daoist talismans.¹⁰⁹ The ritual invokes the stories to provide vividly narrated

¹⁰⁴ Li Fang 李昉 (925–96), comp., *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961) 286, p. 2283.

¹⁰⁵ Li, *Taiping guangji* 80, p. 507: "Chen Xiufu" 陳休復, a story recounting how a Daoist draws a gate through which the soul of a deceased daughter is allowed to enter the room where her mother resides. Also see "Liu Cheng" 柳城 (j. 83, p. 537), also about a Daoist's entering a painting.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 210, p. 1609: "Gu Guangbao" 顧光寶.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 210, pp. 1611–12: "Huanghuasi bi" 黃花寺壁.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 212, p. 1623: "Wu Daoxuan" 吳道玄.

¹⁰⁹ See Meulenbeld, "Daoist Modes of Perception," p. 85

antecedents for the practices laid out in the manual. As I pointed out in my work on Daoist modes of perception, the procedures of this particular ritual refer themselves not just to stories from *Extensive Records* as a form of narrative corroboration, but also to theorems articulated by Zhuang Zi 莊子 as a form of explanation.¹¹⁰ They are based upon the idea that products of brush and ink (be they writing or painting) can be brought to life by making use of the umbilical connection between a writer/painter and his writing/painting, ignoring any sort of distinction between subject and object.¹¹¹ Thus Daoist ritual presents itself as relevant for analysis of “mountains and water” painting, also from the angle of the process of production.

Returning to “The Boat on the Wall,” what makes matters worse for Sir Mao is the fact that the Daoist master never provides any clear instructions: in keeping with the idea that true lessons cannot be taught in words, his guidance consists of drawing an image of a boat, vividly elucidating a handful of transcendents’ paradises “as if he had wandered through each and every one of those places,” and illustrating his alchemical skills by performing them. These indirect, visually conceived hints, are not understood by Sir Mao, nor by the reader, all of whom are used to rely upon direct, verbal explanation.

So let us reconsider the picture of that boat. On the surface of things, the Daoist has merely painted a representation of a boat, a mimetic act that allows the official to recognize the represented phenomenon as a boat. Yet, in addition to omitting any meaningful context for the Daoist doing this, the author emphasizes that “No one understood its meaning,” thus suggesting there *should* be a meaning. Indeed, when the Daoist leaves, the boat suddenly does take on a very specific meaning: namely that of means of escape, an “exit strategy” – a Way out. All of a sudden the boat has transcended the conventional realm, and the reader is made to realize that the Daoist had been providing meaningful visions all along: a *painted* vision of a transportation vessel, a *narrated* vision of transcendental paradises, and a *practical* vision of his alchemical skills. Thus, while reticent in providing explicitly formulated lessons, the Daoist directs the view of Sir Mao towards the higher grounds of Daoist cultivation. In that sense he certainly does offer a path – quite literally, of a Way (a Dao) that grants access to the splendid paradises of Daoist transcendence. The painting’s purpose was thus similar to Guo Xi’s “basic meaning” of “mountains and wa-

¹¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 86–88.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 41.

ter” painting as a place for “dwelling and roaming,” and less a fanciful slight of the artistic hand.

Concretely, the way of viewing paintings that is suggested by the Daoist in this story is one that he frames around his journeys into immortal realms: to the true realm of Jade Purity, the celestial heights of the Purple Palace, the immortal mountains of Yingzhou, and the transcendental gardens of Xuanpu. This extensive selection of Daoist tropes revolves around a sacred geography of transcendental paradises. These marvellous realms of mountainous beauty constitute the priest’s pointed answer to Sir Mao’s questions about finding the Dao, apparently attempting to open up relevant mental space in the mind of the official. He *could* have understood that the exclusivity of the world he has always lived in is but a human construct and that a more perfect world – the eternal world of natural paradises, that is, the world as it is without narrowly being the world of humans – always lies just beyond the everyday world of humans.

The term “transcendental paradise” that I use is based on the Chinese “*xianjing* 仙境,” which could be literally rendered as “transcendents’ precinct,” or “immortals’ realm.” The beings that gain access to this paradise have realized that beyond our constructed world of cultural conventions and social pressures lies another world – a world not built upon conventional human truths, but upon more exalted natural truths. It should be noted once more that even though such paradises are thus hierarchically located on a higher, transcendental level, at the same time the Daoist worldview situates them within our bodies, immanently. They are commonly referred to as “inner landscapes 內景”; and its Daoist versions have been documented roughly since the Jin period.¹¹²

This thinking thus entails not just a “moving out” of the world of conventions, it also means an “entering into” a pristine realm. In Daoist terms, such realms could be found in forests, on mountains, in grottoes, etc., but also deeply hidden within oneself. And that brings us back to “mountains and water” paintings.

ENTERING THE SNOWY MOUNTAINS

In my above description of several late-imperial “mountains and water” paintings, I focused on their patterns as manifestations of an overarching “metapattern” that is the Dao. Such a perspective is as

¹¹² For a general discussion of the idea of inner landscape, see Schipper, *Taoist Body*, chap. 6.

broad as Chinese worldviews allow for. Using the case of Wang Jianzhang's snowy landscape, this last section of my essay will direct its focus back to the detailed level of Daoist ritual. If we contextualize Wang Jianzhang's painting with the Daoist propositions that had gained currency by the late Ming, we find Snowy Mountains prominently soaring into the heights of shared interiority – articulated through ritual procedures.

Indeed, the realm called Snowy Mountains is not an innocent concept that can be taken without further ado as a simple reference to mountains covered in snow. It is a loaded term, apparently constituting a commonplace in the discourse of spiritual cultivation. We can see this term as a commonplace firstly because it is used in other paintings, such as two undated and anonymous paintings with the exact same topic as Wang Jianzhang's work, namely, *Traveling in a Snowy Landscape* (雪山行旅 *Xueshan xinglü*). (See figure 1, above.) One is from around 1100 and in the style of Li Cheng 李成,¹¹³ and the other has been variously dated to the tenth, twelfth, and sixteenth centuries.¹¹⁴ Thus it is not only a matter of Snowy Mountains being a topic, but of its connotation as a place for “traveling 行旅.”

Beyond these closely related examples, the term Snowy Mountains has been used as a trope for a transcendental realm at least since the twelfth century. It appears prominently in a hagiography of the important Daoist/literati god Wenchang 文昌, who was revealed in the year 1181. This text describes how the god undergoes a decisive shift from evil demon towards bona fide Daoist divinity when he is appointed by Heaven as the Great Transcendent of Snowy Mountain (雪山大僊 *Xueshan daxian*). Upon his appointment, the god defines the status of Snowy Mountain as a realm beyond that of everyday reality, with transformative powers. In Terry Kleeman's translation, the god says: “The realm of Snowy Mountain is not of this dusty world, I'll just come here and perch in Perfection.”¹¹⁵ What Kleeman translates with “Perfection” is, indeed, the word *zhen* 真, which signifies not perfection but a “real” sphere, or a “true” realm. Whatever other implications, Snowy Mountain here represents a similar transcendental realm that is depicted on “mountains and water” paintings like the one by Wang Jianzhang.

From around the same time, the recorded sayings of Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200; *Zhu Zi yulei* 朱子語類) stereotype the realm of Snowy

¹¹³ Fong, *Images of the Mind*, p. 40

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 31

¹¹⁵ Terry Kleeman, *A God's Own Tale: The Book of Transformations of Wenchang, the Divine Lord of Zitong* (Albany: SUNY P., 1994), p. 156.

Mountains as the region where Prince Siddhārtha, the future Buddha, went to cultivate himself. In this rendering, the prince “entered the Snowy Mountains in order to practice cultivation.”¹¹⁶ This is particularly meaningful, since none of the known hagiographic accounts of the Buddha make Snowy Mountains a primary topic at all. The Chinese translation of the Buddha’s hagiography mentions it in passing. Zhu Xi’s understanding of this mountain realm, or perhaps more accurately the understanding of the disciples who recorded his sayings, similarly reflects its meaning as a space where one may enter as an ordinary mortal, yet come out as a transformed being of higher spiritual cultivation. Indeed, an almost identical understanding is articulated in a very different late-Ming text, where Snowy Mountain is mentioned (again in passing) as the site where the Buddha practiced cultivation so that his mortal body transformed into a golden body.¹¹⁷

Even more pointedly, a Daoist source from around 1226 locates this mountain within the human body. In interpreting a poetic passage from *Wuzhenpian* 悟真篇 (*Chapters on Awakening to the Perfected*, a text widely popular during the seventeenth century) that contains a mystifying reference to Snowy Mountain, we are informed that it signifies that “within the human body there is a Snowy Mountain.”¹¹⁸ This Snowy Mountain, moreover, is linked to the alchemical furnace, which affords the “completion of the cosmic transformations.”¹¹⁹ As a site where both Buddhist and Daoist forms of cultivation may find their fulfillment, the meaning of Snowy Mountain as a site for transcendence has thus been quite strongly determined. A recent study of “mountain and water” paintings, including snowy mountains, coins the term “inner alchemical vision” to specify the Daoist nature of their visual language.¹²⁰

As a final way to merge the Snowy Mountains of the painting with the mountains of the bodily landscape, reconsider the chart of Lao Zi’s body as included in a manual of Daoist ritual from 1697. In keeping with Ming-dynasty views of the inner landscape, it locates Mount Kunlun at the backside of the brain, a place of eternal darkness: “On the back of the brain lies Mount Kunlun, which is a place where no sun-

¹¹⁶ Li Jingde 黎靖德, ed., *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1986), p. 380 (17.4): 入雪山修行. I would like to thank Chen Lang for bringing this passage to my attention and providing the reference.

¹¹⁷ This is in chap. 77 of *Journey to the West* (*Xiyouji* 西遊記).

¹¹⁸ *Ziyang Zhenren Wuzhenpian jiangyi* 紫陽真人悟真篇講義 (DZ 146), j. 5, p. 4a-b: 人身中有雪山.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.: 方成造化.

¹²⁰ Liu Ziyun, “The True Realm of Vision: The Visualization of Inner Alchemy in Yuan *Shanshui* Painting,” Ph.D., (U. Wisconsin, Madison, 2021).

light shines.”¹²¹ The chart goes on to explain that it is a snowy mountain: “At the place on the back of the brain, where no sunlight shines, there is snow of a thousand years.”¹²² Here, it is again Mount Kunlun that serves as explicit point of reference – only this time the mount is covered in snow. Other such charts of the body, like *Xiuzhentu* 修真圖, kept in the White Cloud Monastery 白雲觀 in Beijing, correlates segments of the spine with the twenty-four energy nodes 二十四氣 of the calendar and situates the calendrical phase “Great Snow” (大雪 *daxue*) right at the point where the spinal cord pushes into the brain.

Note that ritual descriptions of forming a Snowy Mountain inside the body may sometimes look almost identical to the shapes in Wang Jianzhang’s picture. Instead of a soothing blanket of snow that has covered the hard edges in a wintery mountain range, the mountains have risen from below, pushed up by some cosmic force. “If you want to pray for snow, actualize the water from your kidneys rising up; have it congealing into ice, let it burst forth to complete Snowy Mountains.”¹²³ Whether these mountains are to be equated with Mount Kunlun or not, they are similarly located in the upper regions of the body and capture the exact sense of being propelled from below that Wang Jianzhang’s mountains convey.

Finally, on a map by the late-Ming literatus Zhang Heng 章潢 (1527–1608), which superimposes a celestial map of the Twenty-eight Lunar Lodges on the most important geographical locations of the Ming empire, the name Snowy Mountains is given as an alternative appellation of Mount Kunlun (namely, “Mount Kunlun; also referred to as Snowy Mountain 崑崙山, 一名雪山”).¹²⁴ All in all, it seems obvious that when late-imperial audiences would encounter the term Snowy Mountains, they were likely to equate it with Mount Kunlun – and that this, in a sense naturally, should serve as a point of convergence between the fragmented realities of this world and the unified idyll of transcendental realms.

We know too little about Wang Jianzhang to understand what pre-occupied him, but we can further contextualize his Snowy Mountains

¹²¹ 後腦爲崑崙山, 陽光不照之處。This body chart has been analyzed by Patrice Fava, *Aux portes du ciel: La statuaire taoïste du Hunan, Art et anthropologie de la Chine* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres/ÉFEO, 2013), pp. 88–91.

¹²² 後腦陽光不照之處, 却有千年雪。

¹²³ *Daofa huiyuan* 91, p. 5a: 祈雪, 存腎水上升, 結成冰, 湧成雪山。This text otherwise intersects meaningfully with the body chart, e.g., the large overlap between the lines at the left- and right-outer sides of the chart, and those recorded in j. 91, p. 10b.

¹²⁴ Zhang Heng 章潢 (1527–1608), *Tushubian* 圖書編 (SKQS edn.; vol. 969 of Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1987), j. 29, pp. 3b–4a.

by referring to some of his other work. We only need to look briefly at a different painting from his hand, a mountainous landscape entitled *Spring Dawns upon Penglai and Yingzhou* (蓬瀛春曉 *Peng Ying chunxiao*; kept by the Seattle Art Museum). Its title refers unambiguously to two of the most famous transcendental paradises of Daoism.¹²⁵ We already encountered Yingzhou in the story “The Boat on the Wall,” as one of the few topics that our Daoist liked to talk about, as if he had been there himself. Both Penglai and Yingzhou are islands – specifically, they are concealed sanctuaries that can be found only by those who have cultivated the proper vision for reaching transcendence (such as, apparently, by drawing a boat on a wall).

Looking at these mountains of Penglai and Yingzhou, it is hard to miss the vibrancy with which they, too, spring into view – how they seem to burst forth in an explosion of natural growth. They are almost as wild as a raging ocean, even as everyone knows how the growth of mountains is a patient process of slow gestation, a quiet drama that unfolds over countless time-cycles. It reveals how the silent shapes of nature are the manifestation of extraordinary powers. Again, as before, humans can approach these powers and partake of them: painted among the spectacular waves of rocks and plants, tiny figures cross a bridge into the mountains. They can pass through and reach the abode of the immortals, vaguely visible among the clouds, indeed, floating in emptiness.

With both of Wang Jianzhang’s paintings including travellers into the mountains, must we really think of them merely as some arbitrary travellers innocently “traveling” from unknown ‘point A’ to unknown ‘point B’? Should we not rather see them for what they are made to be doing before our eyes, traveling *into* the mountains, literally ascending from a lower plane to a higher realm? In a sphere so closely related to Daoism, should we ignore the relevant phraseology of Daoist ritual, where “entering the mountain 入山” means also “to go into the sacred area” of Daoist ritual and meditative practices?¹²⁶ Or much more literally, can we refrain from considering Daoist recluses who entered the interior of mountains to dwell in caves they consider “grotto heavens 洞天,” aiming to attain transcendence in such a “womb” of the earth, a “matrix for transformation”?¹²⁷

¹²⁵ This painting is available online. See the online section on Chinese Painting & Calligraphy of the Seattle Art Museum: <<http://chinesepainting.seattleartmuseum.org/OSCI/view/objects/asitem/items@:14402/o/classSort-asc/title-asc/sortNumber-asc?t:state:flow=ad4729b8-4f8b-4af7-badc570106c56c13>>

¹²⁶ Schipper, *Taoist Body*, p. 91.

¹²⁷ Franciscus Verellen, “The Beyond Within: Grotto-Heavens (*dongtian*) in Taoist Ritual

Recall also Fan Qi's painting, with a stairway prominently placed at the front of the painting and leading to an open gate that allows access into the painting at an angle so pronounced that it's visually impossible to miss the point (of inflection). Through an open window we can see a figure gazing out of the building, into the distance. Did the painter just paint a nameless figure enjoying the mountain scenery without any further connection to deeper cultural implications of doing so? Understanding cultural implications of a specific time and place that is not our own, as I have argued, can only be achieved when we are aware of our own presuppositions. For as long as we do not reconsider the modes of perception that guide our analysis in the present, when we look at things from the past they will never reveal themselves to us. In the case of a seventeenth century Chinese "mountains and water" painting, the first step is to see in its representation the patterned principles that it expresses, so as to move beyond objective representation and into the interiority from where these patterns arise.

Raoul Birnbaum, in an essay exploring the Buddhist meanings that are registered in the "mountains and water" paintings of Kuncan 髡殘 (1612–1673), suggests that the issue of entering a landscape may have been at stake also in Chinese Buddhist contexts. Concerning one hanging scroll by Kuncan that depicts an individual (probably the painter himself) engaged in a particular Buddhist meditation on the sound of rushing water, Birnbaum says: "And this painting then not only presents this state of mind [of meditative concentration], but also serves as a kind of icon that enables entrance to that state, for one can gaze at the painting, freely enter its domain, and match one's mind, or harmonize it, with the mind registered there in visual terms."¹²⁸ If this is a mind, it is not that of a buffered self, but one that matches its own being with that of the painting.¹²⁹ Indeed, as the aperspectival Chinese landscape draws us in and allows us to lose ourselves in its timeless forms, we are liberated from the linear perspective that holds us in place. For the brief moment of our gaze, we become immortal.

Between a perceiving subject and an observable object lies an incommensurable gap; between a human being and transcendence lies only a mountain landscape. We simply need to keep in mind the stories

and Cosmology," *CEA* 8 (1995), pp. 283–86.

¹²⁸ Raoul Birnbaum, "When is a 'Chinese Landscape Painting' Also a 'Chinese Buddhist Painting'?" in Little, ed., *17th-Century Chinese Paintings*, p. 127.

¹²⁹ Also see the cursory remarks on this "matching" in Meulenbeld, "Daoist Modes of Perception," pp. 47–49.

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that tell us so abundantly: if we unlearn our conventional way of looking at the external surface of a painting, and learn to see this vision of a shared interior – perhaps what we find is paradise itself.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DZ *Zhengtong Daozang* 正統道藏 (See n. 30, for the numbering system used.)

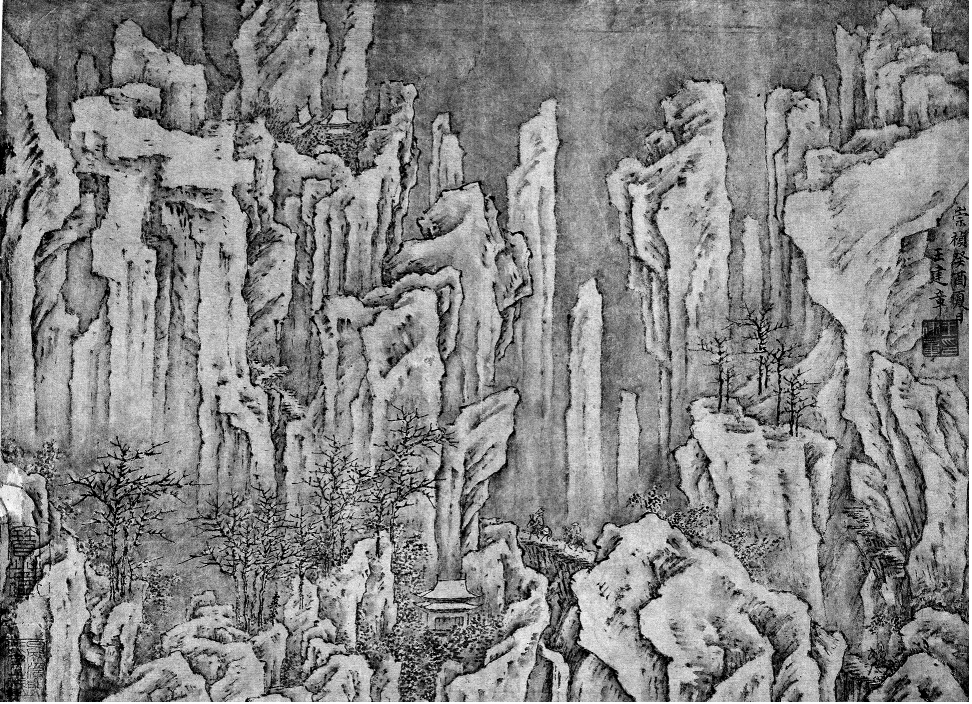


Figure 1. Wang Jianzhang, Traveling in a Snowy Landscape

Tsao Family Collection #63; after Stephen Little, ed., 17th-Century Chinese Paintings from the Tsao Family Collection, pp. 392–93 (fully cited in n. 2, above).



Figure 2. Daoist Chart of the Body

Included in a ritual manual from Jiangxi, dated 1697. Based on an original photo by Patrice Fava taken during a field trip with John Lagerwey, this bitmapped version shows in sharper relief the somewhat indistinct elements of the original photo. I thank Patrice Fava for allowing use of the photo.

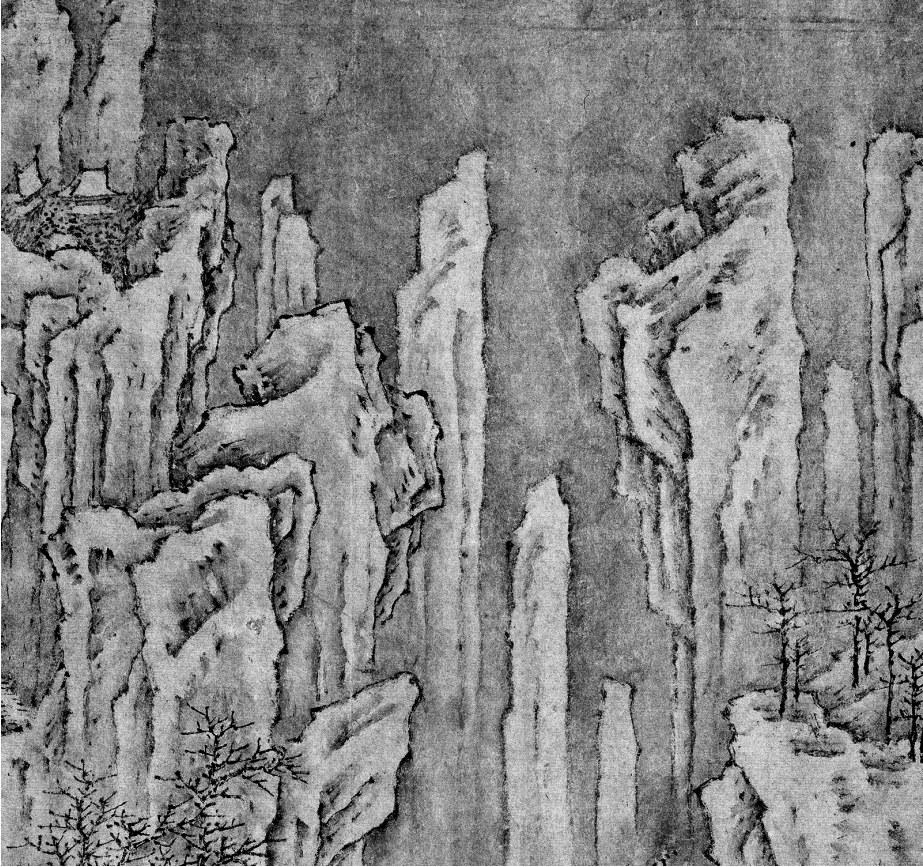


Figure 3. Wang Jianzhang, Traveling in a Snowy Landscape; detail of fig. 1
Note the extraordinarily straight lines of the peaks.



Figure 4. Fan Qi, Winter Landscape

Tsao Family Collection #76; after Little, ed., 17th-Century Chinese Paintings (cited in n. 2), p. 434.



Figure 5. Fan Qi, Winter Landscape; detail of fig. 4

Note the path towards the open gate and the person inside the hut, staring out into a wide open space.

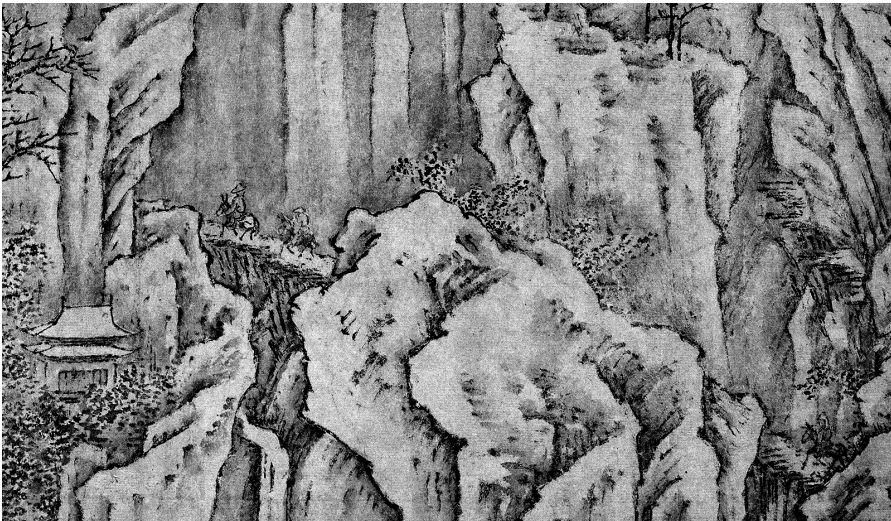


Figure 6. Wang Jianzhang, Traveling in a Snowy Landscape; detail of fig. 1

Note the three travelers: two in the area left-of-center and one in extreme lower-right corner. The original has one more traveling figure, not shown here.



Figure 7. Depiction of Matteo Ricci and Xu Guangqi

From an etching in Athanasius Kircher, China Illustrata (Amsterdam: Jacobus van Meurs, 1667), facing p. 114.

LATE-MING PAINTING OF SNOWY MOUNTAINS



Figure 8. Gong Xian, Landscape

Tsao Family Collection #70; after Little, ed., 17th-Century Chinese Paintings (cited n. 2), pp. 414–15. The original painting consisted of three scrolls that were later cut and remounted as four scrolls. In their current form, the scrolls do not perfectly align.