

## On the Commonalities of Artistic Principles of Landscape Poetry and Painting in Liu Song Dynasty

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### Abstract

It is generally believed that the fusion of poetry and painting was achieved in Tang and Song dynasties. However, in Liu Song dynasty, landscape poetry and landscape painting coincidentally completed the process of being independent. Meanwhile, they both have jointly demonstrated an aesthetic fashion and artistic progress of the times in terms of the creation purpose of enlightenment and emotional experience, the artistic expression of admiring similarity in shape, and the way of framing like “distant reflection” and other similar ways. This shows that Chinese landscape poetry and landscape painting, from the establishment to the development and improvement, has always been in a mutually connected, inspired and influenced relationship.

**Key words:** Poetry and painting; Creation purpose; Artistic expression; Way of framing

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### INTRODUCTION

For the fusion of poetry and painting, Mr. Xu Fuguan has divided it into three steps: first, “poetry on a painting appeared”; second, “use a poem as the theme of the painting”; “further, people use the way of writing a poem to paint” (Xu, 2001). However, Mr. Zhou Jiyin

has divided the fusion of poetry and painting into two aspects: in terms of the surface of the fusion, it shows in “paintings according to poems” and “writing poems for painting”; as for the inner fusion of poetry and painting, “the poeticization of painting’s structure, composition, image, and color” (Zhou, 2005). The opinions of the two scholars have inspired the author on the research of the relationship between poetry and painting. In terms of the external connection between poetry and painting in Liu Song dynasty, there were paintings then such as *Painting of Bamboo Forest*, *Painting of Cicadas and Birds*, *Painting of Xiao Shi*, *Painting of Dreams*, *Painting of Fairies*, and *Painting of Shooting Pheasants* etc.. In terms of poetry, there were poems like *Wu Jun Yong*, *Xiao Shi Qu* and *Dreaming Back to Home* and etc.. They show commonalities in the theme of the creation. Of course, the more important representative of this commonality lies in the early appearance of landscape painting and the appearance of landscape poetry: “From the Eastern Jin dynasty to Liu Song dynasty, landscape painting gradually completed the process of being independent” (Chen, 2000, p.59); and a large number of creations of landscape poetry also started from Liu Song dynasty. The works of Xie Lingyun, Bao Zhao have a great impact on the creation of that time and later generations. Landscape theme frequently appeared in poems and paintings in Jin and Liu Song dynasties, which were related to the influence of metaphysics and Buddhism thoughts, the awakening of human consciousness and scholars’ appreciation of the beauty of landscape. The similar background and the feature of them both in the start-up phase have provided an important prerequisite for the further research of the commonality of the artistic principles of the two artistic forms. Therefore, we will focus on the aspect of the landscape theme to explore the connection between painting and poetry in Liu Song dynasty.

## 1. THE CREATION PURPOSE OF ENLIGHTENMENT AND EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE

On graphic art, people usually tend to focus on its social function on the beginning stages. As it says in Zuo Zhuan, “When the previous Xia dynasty was ethical, far away objects were required to draw in paintings. The executives of nine provinces were required to tribute bronze to make Jiuding and paint the images in the Ding. Thus, all the images were on the Ding to let people distinguish the fetish and monsters.” This kind of attention to political and religious ethics has influenced later paintings, especially the figure paintings. In Famous Paintings in History, there are records of Han People drawing classical and historical allusions to preach Confucianism; Cao Zhi wrote 31 painting reviews of figure painting of Fu Xi and others to illustrate the admonished significance of each painting. This situation began to change in the individual conscious era. For example, the proposal of views such as “similar to the image to show the soul” and “fruitful imagination” in *Theory of Painting* by Gu Kaizhi shows that the missionary function of figure painting has weakened. This development of the theory of painting also directly reflects the landscape painting in its early stage. Zong Bing in the *Preface of Landscape Painting* says:

Then live in a quiet place and adjust my breath; drink wine, play the musical instrument, open the paper for painting, quietly and elegantly sit there to paint the far away landscape. I can see the forest and trees far away; I can also see the uninhabited wild scenery. It contains dangerous cliffs and subtle cloud. Although the wisdom of the previous sages reflects in many generations, all the spirits and thoughts have fused together to provide endless inspirations. What else do I want to do? Just to obtain spiritual pleasure. To get spiritual pleasure, which can be better than landscape paintings? (Yan, 1999)

The proposal of this “spiritual pleasure” shows that the author has reached the aesthetic effect of spiritual pleasure in the experience of the “Way” contained in the scenery. However, in his statement, the scenery is only the carrier of state and experience the Way, which undoubtedly weakens the emotional feature of landscape paintings and the influences the independence of landscape paintings. Later to Wang Wei, we find that this though has quietly changed. For example, Yan Yan has commented on his work, *Painting Theory*: “Painting is not just a list of painting techniques”, which allows to painting to get rid of practicality. The more important thing is his emphasis of “feelings”. His so-called “when the image of the painting has a soul, it can be vivid and thus impress the mind” and his thoughts of “seeing the scenery like autumn cloud or spring wind will provide great pleasure” actually emphasize the dynamic role of “heart” in the aesthetic experience. This means a new aesthetic tendency:

neither taking the natural beauty of the scenery as an expression of abstract metaphysics, nor trying to comprehend

it from the perspective of Buddhism; instead, focusing on the lively spirits and beauty of the scenery and combining it with the emotional feelings and expressions of the subject to the reality of life. (Li & Liu, 1999)

This change also has a distinct reflection from the landscape works of Xie Lingyun and Bao Zhao.

The feature that authors or painters experience the Way through mountains and rivers shows a lot in the poetry of Jin people, such as Wang Xizhi’s *The Second Poem of Orchid Pavilion*:

The spring has awakened everything in the universe and we can enjoy the beauty of nature to look up in the blue sky and look down in the green water. Facing such great scenery created by the nature, I feel all the reasons of the universe are so clear that no explanation is necessary. The creation of the nature is different while it is equally great.

The author looks up and down of the universe in the beautiful and awakening spring. When he appreciates the beauty of the mountains and rivers, he is amazed by the creation of the nature and laments the endless spirit of lives that mountains breed. We can feel that the author is very close to the scenery and wants to enter the realm of unification of all. However, just as the description from other authors of the landscape, his description of the landscape is also in the stage of paragraphs but no articles. The scenery is only a decoration of the experiencing of metaphysics and it is just like the scenery in the figure paintings. Later in Liu Song dynasty, “Zhuangzi’s metaphysics retires and the mountains and rivers come back to life” (*Wenxin Diaolong-Ming Poetry*). Poetry creation finally gets rid of metaphysics and landscape poetry has become independent. However, this does not mean there is no experience of metaphysics in poetry creation. At that time, for landscape poetry, “its form is consistent with that of landscape painting. The forms of the poem or painting require to use image to talk about metaphysics and describe the scenery.” (Li, 2001) Take Xie Lingyun as an example. Although he was the first poet who described mountains and rivers in his poems, inevitably he exposed “reclusive and supreme philosophy of life” in his landscape poetry (Zhu, 1999). This prominently displays in the tail of metaphysics behind landscape poetry. For example, in his poem, *Climbing the Lvzhang Mountain in Yongjia*, it is all the poet’s “rational thinking” from “I totally lost in the forest” to the end. For this, Mr. Huang Jieyang has detailed notes: In the poem, “gu shang gui bu shi” comes from *Zhouyi-Gugua-Shangjiu*: “not serving himself to the higher ranking relatives of the emperor, just admiring their own business”; “lv er mei zhen ji” uses the words from *Yijing-Lvgua-Jiu’er*; “ji ji ji bao yi” originally comes from *Laozi*; “shan xing zi ci chu” comes from *Zhuangzi-Shanxing*. The poet uses metaphysical languages to reveal of his wishes to return to the nature and keeping the innocence. In this type of poems, “metaphysical reasons are not only a dispensable ‘tail’, but important composition

of the structure of the poem". "The description of the scenery is the carrier of metaphysical theories. Poets usually use these carriers to experience, verify and explain metaphysical theories" (Zhan, 2001). The combination of scenery with the philosophy of metaphysics is consistent with the meaning that landscape painting theories express. However, scenery description and the expression of metaphysical theories sometimes are related, the emotional discourse and the scenery discourse sometimes cannot fuse well so that it is cool, not touching.

When landscape poetry developed to the period of Bao Zhao, the emotional subjectivity began to become prominent. In his poems, it is difficult for us to see the closeness between him and the scenery. What we see is the grey landscape covered with frustrating mood. For example, in his poem, *On the Way to Xunyang*, all the scenery description such as "sunset cloud", "evening wind", "blowing sand", "yellow frog", "turning waves" and "white gulls" is so cool and even cold, which reflect the sadness and disappointment of the poet. In his another poem, *From Jingkou to Zhuli*, all the description of the scenery is fully expressive of the poet's feelings of wandering outside. The first two sentences of the poem are description of still scenery, but the use of "inserting" reveals a feeling of upward expansion, which makes the still scenery dynamic. The use of blade to metathesize the mountain rock shows a swift movement and even contains a tendency of danger. The dangerous mountains and waters make readers easily associate this with his unsmooth career. To express emotions and feelings in artistic creation undoubtedly promotes the fusion of all artistic forms. For this, Mr Tang Junyi says, various Chinese artistic forms can fuse and exchange and that is because artists use arts to "express their true emotions and feelings". However,

the true emotions and feelings of people are original one and when they are expressed in paintings and poems, they can express the same spirit. Therefore, we should pursue the comprehensive fusion of various arts to make the spirit of literature and art not confrontational. (Tang, 2005)

This might be the significance of Bao Zhao's landscape poems in Liu Song dynasty.

## 2. ADMIRATION OF "SIMILAR IN SHAPE" IN ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

It is a step forward that mountains and rivers become independent from symbols. But for landscaping works at the early stage, the pursuit of similarity in shape is a necessary approach. The emphasis of the Way in works makes mountains and rivers become objective things, which make the realistic tendency in the creation of landscape works draw more and more attention. The reason is that "painting, as plastic art, any deep thoughts, views or the 'Way' must be effectively carried by images; otherwise they will not be admitted." (Jia, 2005) In terms of painting theory, Zong Bing says in *The Preface of Landscape Painting*:

I cherish Lu Mount and Heng Mount, but I am too old to go to see them. I am so regretful that I cannot personally experience all the mountains and rivers. Therefore, I try to copy them in my painting, using their shape and their color in my painting. (Yan, 1999)

He says he loves mountains and rivers, but due to getting old and unable to get there in person, he has to "save them" in his paintings to experience fantastic thoughts from them. His advocating of

using their shape and color in the painting" just shows the requirement of painting to realistically present the mountains and rivers. This can be seen in others' saying in Liu Song Dynasty, such as Wang Wei's Bao He Yan Shu: "with the love of mountains and rivers, the always pursuit is to imitate the image. (Yan, 1999)

"To imitate the image" shows the emphasis of "similarity". All the above is of important significance in creation methods.

The requirement of "similarity in shape" shown in the painting theory of Zong Bing and Wang Wei also has a vivid reflection in the creation of poets in Liu Song Dynasty. As Liu Xie says:

Since modern times, similarity in shape of a poem is valued. The description of the scenery can be beyond the scenery and meanwhile obtains the image from the nature. The writing is in depth and the experience is wonderful. The language is like the seal printed in the mud. So when reading the language, one can see the image.<sup>1</sup>

This points out that poets in Liu Song dynasty emphasized the vivid and realistic description of the scenery and they out their main focus on the creation of the image. When Zhong Rong comments on the "three famous poets of Yuanjia", he says they all are "clever similarity": the clever similarity in the works of Yan Yan "shows in the careful selection of genre; there is no useless word and every word is meaningful"; Xie Lingyun: "has clever similarity, but it swing swiftly too much and sometimes too complicated"; Bao Zhao: "good at making words of shapes good to have clever similarity"<sup>2</sup>. The styles of the three are totally different and they have different influence towards to later generations; therefore later in South Qi Shu-On Literary Biography, Xiao Zixian proposed "three styles". However, "clever similarity" becomes a common feature of their creation, which cannot but arouse our attention. Generally speaking, the feature of "similarity in shape" in the poetry works of Liu Song dynasty, especially in landscape poetry, mainly manifests in the detailed description of the scenery and shape.

For the depiction of scenery, most commentators admire Xie Lingyuan. For example, someone in Qing Dynasty says: "There is Lingyun first and then there comes out mountains and rivers. Lingyun's poems describe the

<sup>1</sup> [Liang]Liu, X. *Wenxin Diaolong*.

<sup>2</sup> Noted by Chen, Y. J. [Liang]Zhong, R. (1958). *Poetry Notes* (pp.19-32). The People's Literature Publishing House.



endlessness of mountains and rivers. Mountains and rivers are unable to express their own magnificence, but Lingyun can do that<sup>3</sup>. The beauty of mountains and rivers has been written before Lingyun; however, in terms of the delicate and detailed description, it became popular in Liu Song dynasty. Then, poets had a strong sensitivity on mountains and rivers and loved them, trying hard to comprehensively manifest them in their poems. Song Changbai in Qing dynasty once metaphorized the poetry of Lingyun into paintings: “for such poems, there was Kang Le first and then Xuan Cheng; it is just like painting. Kang Le’s poems are full of contents, belong to North Zong school” (Liuting Shihua). Using “full of contents” to comment the works of Xie Lingyun, he focused on the various images of his works. Take *Visiting Lanting* as an example. The first half of the poem describes the scenery, and the second half describes the poet’s feelings. In terms of the scenery, the poet includes all the scenery after the rain such as the dispersed clouds, the red sun in the west, the deep and dense woods, the distant mountains, the branch path to outskirts, the orchids and the early opening lotus flowers in his poem which is full of images. Zhong Rong commented that it is enough to withdraw books and that is the reason. More importantly, the poet uses fresh language and tried to clearly outline what he sees in front of us. Both the personification and the figurative metaphors manifest the delicacy and elegance of the poet’s description. Another example is his *Climbing Chishang Tower*: “Listen to the waves; watch the mountains far away; the previous scenery has changed and the new sun has changed everything. The pool is full of spring weeds. The willow garden becomes a songbird.” In this poem, the poet describes mountains, sunshine, winds, pool, spring weed, willows, and songbirds and so on. Similar to the previous one, there is full of content in each sentence. The language used in each sentence is very accurate and it displays with various senses. Beyond the visual sense, it has the sense of touching with the wind and the sense of hearing with the songbird, which makes the scenery in the early spring very dimensional. This kind of description is very delicate as paintings and it can describe those that paintings cannot express. It shows a high artistic level.

The delicacy of landscape poetry also manifests in the description of the color of the scenery. In term of painting, the handle of the color is an important content of appreciating the beauty. In early landscape painting theories, Zong Bing proposed the creation approach of “using the original shape and color” (*Preface of Landscape Painting*); later Xie He proposed the so-called “six approaches” for painting which also contains “images similar to the object and coloring according to the original object” (*Collection of Comments on Ancient Paintings*). That is to say, the color of the painting should

be in accordance with the original color of different objects. As mentioned earlier, this is a realistic painting approach. The tendency of realism and the pursuit of “similarity in shape” makes it include many features of painting art, among which there is the emphasis of “shapes and colors existing in space” (Lai Xin’s words), just like poets of that time who stress on the color contrast between different scenes to enhance the performance of the work. For example, in Yan Yan’s *Writing after Visiting Quahou Lake on March 3 when Riding to Xingjing and Visiting North Tianhushou as Required*, there are contrasts between black and green or white and green. In his *To the Eastern Palace to Reply to Minister Zheng*, the contrast in color even noticed the cooperation with the light. The cooperation of color and light is skillfully used by Xie Lingyun so that it forms an artistic world with sounds and colors. In many of his works, he uses the contrasts of cold colors and warm colors or uses the comparison of similar colors to show the colorful world. His choice of words is always very careful. He tries to show the vitality of the nature and meanwhile add the sense of intimacy to the nature. In his another work, *Visiting Jingkou Beigu as Required*, in addition to strong contrast between the red peach blossoms and the green willows, it adds light. In his Reading Room, the fallen red flowers are covered on the trail and the green plants with light or deep colors interfere with each other. He uses the contrast of different colors and meanwhile uses comparison of the same color. To conclude the above, his description is more than detailed. Mr. Chen Shouxiang once used the painting of rivers as an example to explain that in Eastern Jin dynasty, painters have produced mature painting approaches to mountains and rivers painting:

The composition of the picture has line groups to show different feelings in difference situations. Making different water features such as hardness, sharpness, power, gentleness, strength, weakness, smoothness, and decline, etc. turn into personified pens, which play the role of expressing the feelings. (Chen, 2000, p.63)

It is pointed out that painters use the change of drawing lines to pass their feelings and emotions. Therefore, Xie Lingyun’s dynamic description of the color of the landscape and his personified expression of the scenery is just similar to the changeable drawing lines in painting.

### 3. SIMILAR FRAMING WAYS SUCH AS “DISTANT REFLECTION”

The commonalities between landscape painting and landscape poetry also reflect in their similar way of observing the nature. Zong Bing in his *Preface of Landscape Painting* discussed the visual feature of the nearer the bigger and the further the smaller, which solves the framing problem of how to express such a huge area of mountains and rivers in a limited picture. And then he clearly pointed out “distant reflection” as a visual

<sup>3</sup> [Qing] Anonymous. *Introduction of Jingju*. Guo, S. Y. (1983). Collected in *Qing Poetry Sequel* (p.1632). Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House.

manifesting way for the framing of landscape painting. This observation way emphasizes the grasp of the panoramic scenery and it also displays a creative sense of “including everything in the universe in one form”, which is also reflected in his other theoretical works. For instance, Mr. Li Liang believes that his “forgetting going back” and “Appreciating landscape paintings to replace their personal visits” show a commonality between landscape poets and landscape painters in viewing scenery, creation and framing: “they travel the mountains and rivers, viewing while walking, watching the scenery with feelings; faced with the active and vivid nature, they quietly watch and remember everything in heart; later they use their pens to compose the picture”, and many later poets’ landscape poems are “expressions of this framing approach of watching while walking for the creation” (Li, 2004) This is actually landscape works’ creation way of “cavalier perspective”. The difference is that the painter just put the general impression of what he observes of the practical object into a painting; however, landscape poetry can be more or less provide readers with the visual change process. Take Zong Bing as an example. His landscape poems show this viewing feature. From him *Climbing White Bird Mountain*, we can find his manifesting of flat and distant vision, while the description in his *Climbing Half Stone Mountain* makes people notice his visual change of looking up and looking down. This scenery viewing perspective shows a positive meaning as a result of the dual identity of Zong Bing as a painter and poet.

This kind of “sparkling eyes” (Zong Baihua’s words) in the appreciation of mountains and rivers has come into existence in scenery descriptions before landscape painting. Cao Pi’s *An Essay on Liyang* is a good example. This shows that the skill features of landscape painting are very likely inspired by literary works. It is just like the “three distances”<sup>4</sup> way concluded in the “cavalier perspective” by Guo Xi in the Northern Song dynasty which was early manifested in poets’ works in Yuanjia Period. For flat distance such as *Visiting Red Stone and Entering the Sea* and *Visiting Nanting*, eyes reach the endless water or go from close sights and expand to distant mountains. For high distance such as *Shishi Mountain*, when looked up, the scenery is very upright. Poems like *Climbing Lvzhang Mountain in Yongjia* and *Climbing the Top of Shimen* depict the realm of deep distance. Meanwhile, the three perspectives in the works are not independent. Usually they are combined to express the author’s characteristics of “as large as the sky and the sea and as detailed as the grass and trees”

<sup>4</sup>Guo, X. in Northern Song dynasty proposed the way of “three distances” and said “there are three distances for mountains: From the mountain foot to the top is called the high distance; from the front of the mountain to the back is called deep distance; from the close mountains to distant mountains is called flat distance. The color of high distance is clear; the color of deep distance is mysterious; the color of flat distance is clear and mysterious. High distance is outstanding; deep distance is overlapping; flat distance is misty.” (see Zhou, J. Y. (2005). *Digest of Chinese Painting Theory* (p.429). Jiangsu Arts Publishing House.)

(Bai Juyi’s *Reading Xie Lingyun*) in viewing scenery. In Xie Lingyun’s *Climbing the Top of Shimen*, it contains descriptions of flat distance and deep distance, which informs readers of the visual change of the poet. In his *Watching from Southern Mountain to Northern Mountain over the Lake*, the description combines high distance with deep distance. “This kind of description straightly depicts what the eyes see but it has lasting appeal, which is very inspirational to later paintings; therefore, He Zhuo called this “can inspire painting theory” (He, 1987).

Various traditional Chinese arts “often influence each other and even mutually include each other... therefore, various arts in terms of aesthetical specialties and aesthetical appreciation often can find commonalities or similarities.” (Zong, 1981) This is especially true of poetry and painting. From the above discussion, we can see that there are commonalities in terms of creative functions and aesthetical features between landscape poetry and landscape painting in Liu Song dynasty. This suggests that various artistic forms are not only influenced by the aesthetical style of their times at the early stages, but also develops in mutual learning.

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