

Cosmology and Aesthetics in Chinese Landscape Paintings*

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The artist could start with his training in the basic techniques in Chinese paintings, but his talent has to meet the challenge as to whether he could feel and understand Nature as Qi-creativity. Nature is to be understood as naturing (naturans) or as being from its own which is also like from the artist himself. He has to identify himself with Nature. He also needs to see oneness as creating many and many as creating one by always preserving oneness. This is basically the cosmology of *taiji* and *yinyang* from Yizhuan and Laozi which evolves into the *xuanxue* 玄学 of dialectics of being and nonbeing (*youwu* 有无) of Wang Bi in Wei-Jin 魏晋 Period. One must see how an onto-generative cosmology of “comprehensive observation” be transformed into an onto-generative epistemology of “comprehensive intuition” so that the artist would be able to form / frame /project his painting. In doing so he is capable of even using the medium, silk or paper, as an intrinsic part of the painting itself such as a water fall or the extended space and even transforms colors into colorless, forms into formless. It is in light of this basic transformation, one’s mind could experience a freedom of techniques as freedom of spirit and thus make one’s techniques and process of painting a part of a creative process of one’s own naturalization.

Along with nature, I like to stress the artist’s mind feeling of life in life’s effortless manifestation of form and motion as parts of nature. Life must be uniquely presented in uniqueness of its own with its natural form and gesture, in an open space of harmony and harmonization, which must be spontaneously provided by the artist’s feeling – understanding of nature and life.

The above is a simplified account of my onto-hermeneutical understanding of art of Chinese landscape painting. In the text I shall cite Yijing, Laozi, Zhuangzi, Xiehe, Wang Wei, Wang Guowei as sources of such a view. I shall analyze a few master landscape paintings from Ming-Qing to facilitate feeling-understanding a creative process seeking both natural spontaneity in paintings and cosmic self-freedom in the painter.

*A contemporary well-known Chinese painter-artist Liu Jichao 刘继潮 from the Anhui School of Painting 安徽画院 has cited my theory of “comprehensive observation 观” as source and basis for his art of landscape paintings in his 2014 book on “roaming observation 游观” and subsequently has a dialogue with me on cosmology and aesthetics of Chinese paintings. I have incorporated some of my points in speaking of a theory of Chinese landscape paintings dated back to the time of Wei-Jin 魏晋.