

## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CHINESE AND WESTERN ARTS FROM 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY TO ONWARDS

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The Jesuits shaped the head of European cultural access to China. It was their pictures, prints, books that produced the first signs of European influence in Chinese Painting, and their writings that turn into the first detailed explanation of the arts of China in 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe. But the question is how the two paintings of Europe and China merge with each other and what are the differences between them in terms of painting theory. For this purpose, one example of Chinese paintings of Wu Li (1632- 1718) who was a landscape painter and another example from Casper David Friedrich (1774-1840) from Germany who is known as Romantic painter have been taken. Jesuit missionaries centered around Confucianism that under the leadership of Matteo Ricci after 1592. Landscape paintings were based on Confucian philosophy. On the other hand Casper David Friedrich (1774-1840), a Romantic painter, explains that landscape paintings are the replacement of human actions to express human emotions. The aim of this paper is to make a visual or formal analysis of the two paintings from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century as according to the painting theory.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Chinese Art, European Art, Landscape Painter, Orthodox Painter, Romantic Painter*

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### **Article History**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The Jesuits shaped the head of European cultural access to China. It was their pictures, prints, books that produced the first signs of European influence in Chinese Painting, and their writings that turn into the first detailed explanation of the arts of China in 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe. The most important approach of the Jesuit missionaries centered around Confucianism. It is a well-established fact that under the leadership of Matteo Ricci who arrived in Macao in 1592, the Jesuits wanted to engage in a satisfactory dialogue with Confucian tradition. Landscape paintings were based on Confucian philosophy which was totally different from Europe. About this fact Ricci has a paragraph on Chinese painting in his wonderful account of China –

“The Chinese use pictures extensively, even in crafts but in the production of these and especially in the making of statuary and cast images they have not at all acquired the skill of Europeans. They know nothing of the art of painting in oil or of the use of perspective in their pictures, with the result that their productions are lacking any vitality.” (Sullivan,1973)

On the other hand landscape paintings of Europeans are vibrant in color and use of perspective are very prominent. For instance, Casper David Friedrich (1774-1840) name can be mentioned, who is known as Romantic painter. In an explanation of one of his painting he explains that landscape paintings are the replacement of human actions to express human emotions.

But during the Mid Qing dynasty the single point perspective of Europe which is not mathematical perspective could also be found in some court paintings which were made under the supervision of Jesuit painters.



**Figure 1**

Casper David Friedrich(1774-1840), hanging scroll, *The cross in the mountain or the Theschen Ritable*, 1807, Museum. 150x110 cm, Gemaldegalerie, Dresde



**Figure 2**

Huang Bi (1720-1780), *Landscape*, detail, color on paper, 164.5x88 cm. Guangzhou Art

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But the question is how the two paintings of Europe and China merge with each other and what are the differences between them in terms of painting theory.

For this purpose, one example of Chinese paintings of Wu Li (1632- 1718) has been taken. Wu Li, who was a landscape painter and was best known among all the Chinese artists who came in contact with European culture. And another example from Casper David Friedrich (1774-1840) from Germany who is known as Romantic painter.

The aim of the paper is to make a visual or formal analysis of these two paintings according to the painting theory.

## Chinese Painting Theory

Literati painting really started during the Song dynasty and became the most prestigious type of painting during the Yuan dynasty. During the Ming dynasty, it was codified even further. Dong Qichang (1555-1636) who was a Chinese painter, scholar, calligrapher, and art theorist of the later period of the Ming dynasty, gave it a theoretical foundation that was to last at least until the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In the history of Chinese painting and calligraphy, Dong Qichang advocated the classification of Chinese paintings into Southern School and Northern School, based on the two different styles and techniques employed in landscape paintings. The Northern School was represented by artists like Li Sixun, Zhao Boju, Ma Yuan and Xia Gui, while the Southern School was represented by masters such as Guan Tong, Dong Yuan, Ju Ruan, Mi Fu, Wu Li and Mi Youren. The Northern school painters used more colors, making more details and therefore closer to the works of professionals and court painters. On the other hand the Southern school painters used less colors, using washes of ink and therefore closer to the works of literati.

The classification separated completely the ‘professionals’ from the ‘amateurs’. One of the qualities of Southern school is flat and bland. The respect for the can only be achieved through the search for a personal style. With Dong Qichang, the only landscape is worthy of the attention of literati painters.

Landscape and Calligraphy is based on the poem *Ode to Misty River and Mountain Peaks* in the collection of *Wang Dingguo* by Su Shi of the Song dynasty and on the painting *Misty River and Mountain Peaks* by the

Song master Wang Shen (aka Wang Jinqin). Dong Qichang’s most interesting contribution is his understanding of composition, which he divides into three notions:

‘Dragon veins’: This expression is used in Chinese geometry.

‘Opening –closing’ which was expressed by Dong as ‘proportioning-uniting’: In landscape painting it is necessary to understand the principal of proportioning and uniting. It is important to understand that there is a proportioning of the entire painting and a proportioning of each individual section.

‘Rising – lowering’. (<http://www.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/~fadept/FAA3109/3109lect.htm>).

### The Analysis of the Paintings



**Figure 3**

Wu Li (1632-1718), *Spring Colors In Hutian*, Hanging scroll, Ink and Color on paper.



**Figure 4**

Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840), *The Tree of Crows*, 1822, oil, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

<http://www.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/~fadept/FAA3109/3109lect.htm>

Among the two paintings those have been chosen, one is Chinese literati landscape painting and the other one is romantic landscape painting.

The former one is the painting of an orthodox painter of early Ch'ing who used the criteria for traditional painting and the second one is the romantic landscape paintings of Friedrich who believe that landscape is the background of the human action.

After observing these two art works the first thing was noticed about Friedrich's painting was the human's figure. It is mentioned before that he used human in front of the landscape in his paintings but this picture is different. Here he used a tree with crows in the middle of the painting. Tree and crows are also living things which could be the substitute for

human.



Use of dots



Use of brushstroke

**Figure 5: Blow up of the Paintings**

For Wu Li's painting it is strongly noticed that the calligraphic brushstroke was replaced by the close knit texture of dots. He believed that rather than depending on the fixed pattern Chinese painting concentrates entirely on the problems of dark and light, front and back and for the writing inscriptions they wrote on the top of a painting and the European artist signed at the bottom of the painting.

The similarities which are found into these two paintings are firstly the placement of the tree. Both are placed in the center of the canvas. According to Wu Li, Chinese painting concentrates on front and back. Into his painting he concentrated into this fact very carefully. Starting with the tree he finished up his painting at the sharp edge of the mountain. He placed the tree at the front and the mountain at the back. This similarity is also found in Friedrich's painting where he placed the tree at the front and the mountain at the back. And the second is that in literati painting the use of void with mountain and water is noticed. The relationship among the void, mountain and water also found in the painting of Friedrich. The similarities and differences can be summarized in the following way:

Similarities of two paintings:

- A tree is the focus of the paintings. The placement of the tree is in the front of the canvas and the mountain in the back of the tree.
- The detail of the tree is prominent in both paintings.
- Use of mountain, water, and void are prominent in the two paintings.
- The trees seem to be rigid in two paintings.
- Using of the single vanishing point.



**Figure 6**

In both paintings a single vanishing point and the use of void area are strongly noticed. In Wu Li's painting pathway is very prominent where crows are very prominent in other paintings.

Differences between these two paintings:

- The use of colors. In Wu Li's painting the colors are light and not very vibrant. Specially the color of the sky and the mountain.
- In Friedrich's painting tree covers almost the whole canvas. But on the other hand in Wu Li's painting the front tree is covering almost 1/3 of the canvas.
- The area of the void of Wu Li's painting is bigger than Friedrich's painting.
- Use pathways in Wu Li's painting on the other hand crows are very important features in Friedrich's painting.
- The new features those have been found into these two art works which are different compared with the contemporary style of works of these two paintings.
- It has been noticed that the surface of the mountain is so smooth in Wu Li's work comparing with other Chinese landscape painting.
- The way he drew the pathway in his painting and terminate it onto the mountain which is rare in landscape painting.
- On the other hand in Friedrich's painting, he used the crows instead of the human figure which is also cannot found in the romantic landscape paintings.



**Figure 7**

New things that are found in this Painting is the use of uniform tone. On the mountain and termination of the pathway



**Figure 8**

In this painting Friedrich used a tree witherows instead of a human.

### **Discussion about the Similarities and the Differences**

The landscape painter Wu Li is one of the Six masters of the early Ch'ing who spent 7 years in Macao and is the best known among all the Chinese artists who came in contact with European culture. He spent most of his life as a missionary but there is a doubt whether Wu's Christian faith had any influence on his artistic activity or not. As a Jesuit missionary he has seen a great deal of western painting and books and he wrote a brief note on the difference between Chinese and western art.

“Our painting does not seek physical likeness, and does not depend on fixed patterns; we call it ‘Divine’ and ‘untrammled’. Theirs concentrates entirely on the problems of dark and light, front and back, and the fixed patterns of physical likeness. Even in writing inscriptions, we write on the top of a painting, and they sign at the bottom of it. Their use of the brush is also completely different. It is the way with everything and I cannot describe it all.”(Sullivan, 1973).

There are no direct copies of Europeans works of western influence that could be found in 17<sup>th</sup> century Chinese landscapes painting. Rather than it can be seen a new approach to the rendering of form in nature, and a little extending of the range of subject matter that can be illustrated.

- They used a sharper edge in the mountains, rocks and ground.
- Using of calculated grading of tone to render form more independently
- The transitions from light to dark
- Shading is used with a single light source
- The calligraphic brushstroke is replaced by the close knit texture of dots and strokes that sometime suggests engraving

All those characteristics can be found in Wu Li's paintings and also the sharp edge of the mountain, the grading tone, transitions from light to dark, shading in Friedrich's landscape painting.



**Figure 9: Blow up of the Paintings**

In both painting the use of sharp edge for mountain and for tree can be seen.



**Figure 10: Blow up of the Paintings**

In both painting the grading tone on the ground using of shade, and transition from light to dark can be seen.

On the other hand Friedrich who is one of the romantic painters had used landscape as a background of human action. And human is the main subject matter in his painting. And he used the figure in a different relationship with the landscape.

And he always used the back of the human figure. The rocks are so rigid. One more thing is noticeable in his painting is the framing of time. The way he used the color in the sky actually represent a certain time of the day.



The tree is so rigid in form. But on the other hand in Chinese painting one cannot feel the time as the painting is very dull and flat. In Chinese painting the use of void is a must. But in other painting it is noticeable that the void area which is not that much prominent. The main differences are the focus of the painting. One is using a tree with crows as the main feature of the paintings but the other one is using merging the trees with the whole painting.

### **Discussion about the New Features**

The new features that are found in these two paintings are:

- The position and the termination of the pathway in Wu Li's painting.
- The surface of the ground and the mountain is so smooth which actually could not find in the contemporary Chinese painting.
- In Friedrich's painting he used crow and the tree without leaves which is also uncommon features in romantic landscape painting.

In this paper it has been tried to establish the findings with some of the examples of the other contemporary painters of Romanticism and from early Ch'ing who are known as Orthodox painter.

### **The Orthodox Painter**

The new painter can express his feelings in his own way although he is an orthodox painter because the orthodox painter is the follower of Ancients. And also they used the new technique very carefully. To basis on this point it can be said that Wu Li actually follows his Ancients but has his own feelings in the painting. In his writing he mentions about dark and light, front and back, shading.

If compared this painting with other of his work and also with the other contemporary painters, the use of pathways actually could not be seen.

There are two or three examples can be found with the path way but those are not as prominent as his one. The second one is his rendering technique of the mountain which is so smooth not like the other Chinese paintings. The mountains are so rigid in form and rough in texture but this type of rendering cannot be seen in Wu Li's painting

## Examples



**Figure 11**

Qing, Wang Shimin (1592-1680), *Landscape*, hanging scroll, color on paper, 171.7 x 60.2 cm. Shanghai Museum.



**Figure 12**

Qing, Wang Jian (1598-1677), *Landscape*, screen, color on silk, 162.7 x 51.1 cm. Shanghai Museum



**Figure 13**

Qing, Wang Hui (1632-1717), *Interpretative Copy of Li Cheng's 'Reading in the Autumn Mountains*, color on silk, 128.7 x 74.5 cm. Qingdao City Museum



**Figure 14**

Qing, Wang Yuanqi, (1642-1715), *River Countryside in a Spring Dusk*, hanging scroll, color on paper, 135 x 58.6 cm. Suzhou City Museum.

<http://www.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/~fadept/FAA3109/3109lect.htm>

From the above paintings of four Wang's who are famous orthodox painter, no resemblance cannot be found with Wu Li's paintings. The pathway in to those pictures can be noticed but those pathways are not as prominent as Wu Li's one. And also the rendering method is different than Wu Li's paintings. They have used the pathway in the mountain but

they have not terminated those in the mountain. Comparing with those pictures it can be said that the way they rendered the mountain is much more complex than Wu Li's one. He uses a very flat blending technique of rendering.

### The Romantic Painter

In the romantic movement Friedrich tries to inspire the idea of man's helplessness against the force of nature by his mysterious landscape paintings. The painter used the human figure as the focus of his paintings and landscape as the background of the painting. But in this painting he used the crows as a living feature. Through this painting he is trying to say that human being is not only facing a natural force or fighting against them other animals and birds also fighting against nature.



**Figure 15**

Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840), *Solitary Tree*, 1821; Oil on canvas, 55 x 71 cm; National Gallery, West Berlin

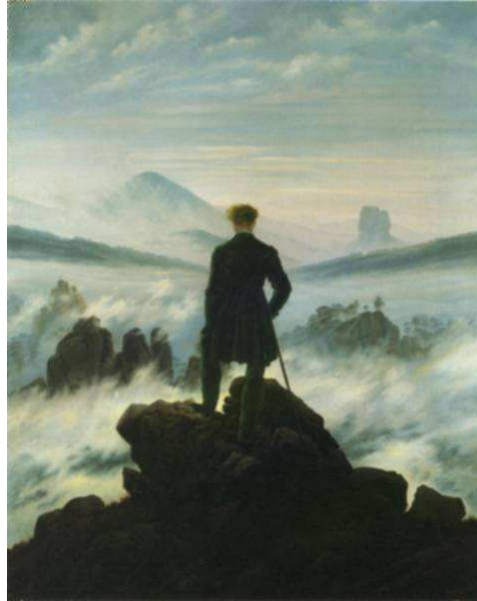


**Figure 16**

Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840), *Moon Rising over the Sea*, 1821, oil on canvas, Hermitage, St. Petersburg

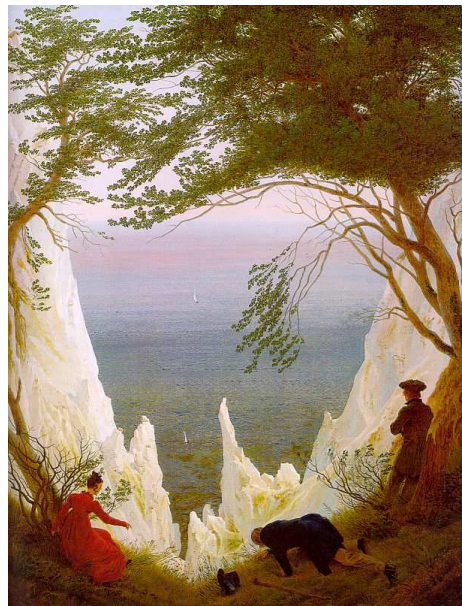
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Above those two pictures it can be seen that how he draws the landscape with the human figure. In the first picture any crows or other living features cannot be seen. In the first picture he used the tree but with the leaves. From both of his paintings the time can be imagined. Which cannot be seen in the Chinese paintings. It can also be seen that these pictures have a human figure against the landscape.



**Figure 17**

Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840), *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, 1818; Oil on canvas, 94 x 74.8 cm; Kunsthalle, Hamburg



**Figure 18**

Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840), *Chalk Cliffs on Rügen*, 1818, Oil on canvas, Oskar Reinhart Foundation, Winterthur

<http://www.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/~fadept/FAA3109/3109lect.htm>

## CONCLUSIONS

In this paper a visual or formal analysis of the two paintings from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century have been done according to the painting theory. In Wu Li's painting it has been found that how he used his own style. And how he rendered the mountain. Actually this factor quite goes with the European style. On the other hand Friedrich also copied the

landscape like the Chinese traditional painter but he captured the time also which is totally absent in Chinese paintings.

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