

The Beauty of Daoist Philosophy in Chinese Landscape Painting

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Abstract. Daoist philosophy and landscape painting are both significant cultural treasures of China, and understanding landscape painting and Daoist philosophy is crucial for comprehending Chinese art. The ideological foundation of Chinese landscape painting lies in Daoist philosophy, which permeates the developmental trajectory of landscape painting. Based on this, the article examines the beauty of Daoist philosophy in Chinese landscape painting, focusing on: The embodiment of Taoist philosophy in landscape paintings, and The beauty of Taoist philosophy elements in landscape painting. This paper provides reference for the inheritance and development of traditional Chinese landscape painting.

Keywords: Taoist philosophy; Chinese landscape painting; Natural

1 Introduction

Artistic and cultural works most vividly embody the creator's ideological and cultural background. Under the influence of Daoist thought, landscape painting, in its distinctive manner, dynamically reflects the artist's attitude towards nature and society, thereby revealing Chinese perspectives on nature, life, and society [1]. Although there has been extensive research on Daoist philosophy, Song dynasty landscape painting, and Daoist aesthetics, an exploration from the perspective of the mutual achievements of landscape painting and Daoist philosophy is lacking. Therefore, Analyzing the beauty of Taoist philosophy in Chinese landscape painting can better inherit and develop landscape painting and Taoist thought.

2 Method

This article adopts the case study method, using historical data, archival data, observation and other methods to collect and analyze data, and draw conclusions. Firstly, the article adopts the document research method, collects, sorts out and identifies the existing historical documents and materials related to the research of this topic. Secondly, this research uses the observation method to analyze the Taoist aesthetic concept in Chinese traditional landscape painting. The thirdly is image analysis, through the study and analysis of the images of artists' works, to explore the relationship between Taoist philosophy and landscape painting.

3 Results

The Daoist philosophical concepts of 'Dao follows nature', asserts that "human behavior should align with the natural order of the heavens, the Earth, and all creation", conveys the idea of 'experiencing spiritual delight in nature, embracing the vast beauty of the universe through simplicity' [2]. The mountains and waters depicted in landscape paintings symbolize the epitome of nature's expression. The undulating mountain ranges, flowing rivers, rocks, trees, birds and insects collectively showcase the diverse and enchanting of nature, in the contemplation "picking a flower and smiling", it expressing the intrinsic beauty characterized by qualities of "relaxation, spirituality, and subtlety" [3]. In Taoist thought, emphasizes the concept of "governance through non-action", advocating a non-coercive approach, to achieve a pictorial realm of harmonious coexistence. These prompt us to reevaluate our relationship with nature.

4 Discussion

Traditional Chinese landscape painting seeks an organic integration with modern society to align more closely with the aesthetic preferences and cultural heritage demands of the present era. It aims to inherit the profound and lofty aspects of traditional Daoist philosophy, showcasing the unique cultural characteristics of the coexistence of emptiness and reality. This is achieved through the incorporation of digital technology, virtual reality, and AI. Chinese landscape painting in the new era should play a positive guiding role in the social and cultural field [4]. The diverse landscape of the contemporary era calls for a diversified painting style, and the field of art needs to explore directions for multifaceted development [5].

5 The Embodiment of Taoist Philosophy in landscape paintings

Daoist philosophy holds that the "Dao" is modeled after nature, and only by adhering to the natural laws of the Heavenly Dao can all things coexist and nature flourish[6]. This perspective on nature and life influences the creation of landscape paintings, therefore, an exploration of the essence of Daoist thought can be derived from landscape painting.

5.1 "The Along the River During the Qingming Festival"

"The Along the River During the Qingming Festival" (refer to Figure 1) was created by the Song Dynasty painter Zhang Zeduan and stands as one of the masterpieces representing Chinese landscape painting. In the painting, people engage in recreational activities and ceremonies along the river, while the architecture, street layouts, and natural landscapes are depicted vividly. The attire, movements, and expressions of the figures in the painting are meticulously portrayed. Art originates from life, Aesthetic creation has consistently pursued a sense of naturalness. By depicting the integration of individuals and nature, the artist reflects the Daoist philosophy's concept of "harmony between heaven and humanity."

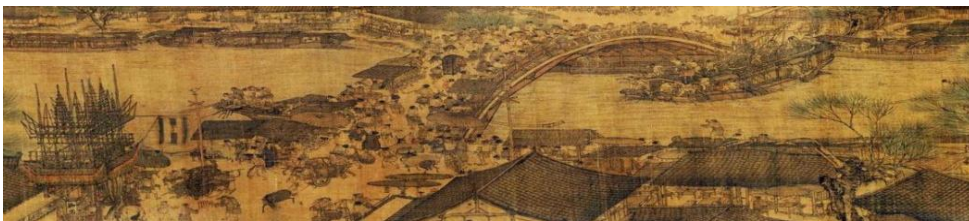


Figure 1. Zhang Zeduan.'Along the River During Qingming Festival', 1104

5.2 "The Thousand-Mile Landscape"

"The Thousand-Mile Landscape" (refer to Figure 2) is a work by the renowned Song Dynasty artist Wang Ximeng. The painting portrays the natural landscapes, daily lives of the people, and cultural scenes in the Yangtze River basin, it embodying the Daoist philosophy of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature[7].



Figure 2. Wang Ximeng.'The Thousand-Mile Landscape'

In this artwork, one can observe a meticulous approach to life, a genuine expression of the soul, and a state of natural spontaneity. The natural elements such as mountains, water, rocks, and trees in the painting are presented vividly. By experiencing the depicted scenes and sentiments, viewers can resonate with the artist, understanding the Daoist philosophy's concept of "Dao follows nature."

5.3 "The Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains"

"The Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains" is a masterpiece by the renowned Yuan Dynasty artist Huang Gongwang. It depicts the natural landscapes and human life along the Fuchun River. The painting with its understated and tranquil ink expressions embodying the Daoist concept of "The Dao gives birth to One, One gives birth to Two, Two gives birth to Three, Three gives birth to the myriad things." The interaction between ink and water, where less water yields depth and more water yields lightness, represents the Daoist philosophy's interplay of yin and yang. The subtle balance of ink's intensity and lightness resonates with the harmonious combination of yin and yang, shaping the mountains and rivers in the picture. Huang Gongwang achieves the presentation of Daoist ideals in art—tranquil inaction and natural simplicity[8].

In conclusion, China's renowned landscape paintings serve as expressions of Daoist philosophy. Through them, we can gain a better understanding of the relationship between Chinese art and Daoist philosophy. Daoist philosophy directly or indirectly influences our appreciation of natural landscapes and our comprehension of the Dao of heaven and earth.

6 The Beauty of Taoist Philosophy Elements in Landscape Painting

Chinese landscape painting, in its expressive process, enriches people's imagination and provides spiritual solace through inherent temperament, charm, and artistic conception. "Artistic conception" is the essence of classical Chinese aesthetics, particularly evident in Song and Yuan Dynasty landscape paintings. The creative process of landscape painting emphasizes the pursuit of temperament and artistic conception, fundamentally combining the inner emotional experience of individuals with the effective fusion of aesthetic appreciation of nature.

6.1 Aesthetic Conception of "Dao Follows Nature"

In the creation of Chinese paintings, artists must not allow brush and ink to dominate the entire canvas. Even when portraying towering mountains, lush forests, there must be empty spaces left between mountains and trees. These "empty spaces are not lifeless physical spaces or frameworks that allow material to flow within, but rather the most vibrant source of life, from

which all diverse rhythms flow out" [9]. On the other hand, the artist's creative process should transcend the constraints of technique and proceed with an unplanned state of inaction. Only in this way can the "Dao" be fully presented. Therefore, when appreciating landscape paintings, attention is focused on the essential elements such as mountains, water, clouds, and trees.

6.2 "The Artistic Conception of 'Wu Wei'"

"Wu Wei" signifies aligning with the natural order and refraining from excessive intervention. In the domain of landscape painting, "Wu Wei" pertains to the artist's creative state. The artist should engage in the creative process with a natural and unforced approach, forgetting techniques and working in a state devoid of predetermined actions. This "empty" artistic form serves as an aesthetic expression, enabling the absorption of the "existence" of mountains and rivers worldwide. It represents the artistic manifestation of the "realm" in Chinese landscape painting. We should refrain from pursuing personal desires and appreciate the artwork with a calm mindset to sense the natural ambiance.

6.3 The Realm of "Wu Ji and Tai Ji"

'Wu Ji' and 'Tai Ji' are significant concepts in the history of Chinese philosophy, signifying the origin and root of the universe. Daoist thought regards the universe as an infinite whole. "The painting receives the ink, the ink receives the brush, the brush receives the wrist, the wrist receives the heart, like the creation of heaven and the formation of earth" (Qing Dynasty, Shitao, 'Painting Quotations'). When appreciating landscape paintings, attention should also be directed to the cosmology depicted in the artwork, representing an infinite beauty with endless possibilities and creativity. In 'Nan Zong Jue Mi,' it is mentioned, The white in the painting is the painting within the painting, which is also the painting beyond the painting. This implies that the emptiness in the painting is only at the visual level, not at the level of significance. Through various techniques and skills, creating diverse styles and forms in landscape painting, allowing viewers to sense both the finite and infinite aspects of the universe.

7 Conclusion

Daoist thought and its artistic philosophical concepts have profoundly influenced the artistic development and cultural spirit of our country. Chinese landscape painting influenced by it gradually developed its unique artistic philosophy and painting theory. Daoist philosophy, with its free and open philosophical speculation, provides painters with more creative inspiration and spiritual nourishment. As a traditional Chinese culture, landscape painting should not only

inherit traditional philosophy, but also keep pace with the times. Therefore, traditional Chinese landscape painting seeks an organic integration with modern society. We need to achieve a fusion of tradition and innovation, emphasize cultural self-confidence and cultural awareness, and focus on social responsibility and public cultural services, among other efforts, to promote the inheritance and development of landscape painting culture.

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