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Nathaniel Goldblum April 8th, 2021

Sacred Nature: Perceptions of Nature in the Writings and Works of the Hudson River School and the Northern Song Dynasty Landscape Painters

by

Nathaniel Goldblum

Eric Reinders
Adviser

Religion

Eric Reinders
Adviser

Anna Grimshaw
Committee Member

Linda Merrill
Committee Member

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Abstract

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This study examines similarities and differences of conceptions of nature as sacred in the landscape painting movements of the Hudson River School in nineteenth century America and the Song Dynasty in eleventh century China. To accomplish this comparison, historical, religious, philosophical, and other cultural elements of each tradition are analyzed for how they contributed to unique perceptions of nature as sacred. The primary axis of comparison focuses on close readings of two central texts, one from each tradition, - Asher B. Durand's *Letters on Landscape Painting* and Guo Xi's *The Lofty Message of Forests and Streams* for America and China respectively - which epitomize their respective times and beliefs. The ideology and practice which both cultures produced are strikingly similar and yet subtly different. The study demonstrates the intersection of art, ideology, and religion and supports contextual readings of nature and art as relevant to society.

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Introduction: The Study of Sacred Nature

There are many ways to approach the study of humankind's relationship with nature. Landscape painting is but one of these possible approaches; however, it is one which has much to offer. Landscapes are cultural constructs. A landscape is many things, but at its root it is a human creation: a discrete, identified place onto which is attached any number of beliefs, traditions, or associations. A piece of land is not inherently a landscape; it may refer to specific natural locations, but it almost certainly means something human or finds significance in the relationship of that location to a certain group of people. Therefore, to study landscapes is to study how humans conceptualize and interpret their environments.

The history of the word *landscape* in English reveals that the idea is constructed and inevitably a human creation. "*landschap*, like its Germanic root, *Landschaft*, signified a unit of human occupation, indeed a jurisdiction, as much as anything that might be a pleasing object of depiction" (Schama 1996, 10). Guo Xi will make a similar distinction in his text *The Lofty Message of Forests and Streams* in his discussion of the types of land – those which are suitable for travel, sightseeing, wandering, and living (Hay et al. 2005, 381). It is always the human relationship with the land which dictates our perception and definition of land. So, in studying a landscape, one is studying more than just the grass and trees which compose the scene; one inevitably scrutinizes human relations with the natural world.

Landscape paintings are products of humans recreating nature with their own hands. A landscape painting is an image of how a painter sees nature; whether the painting is intended for professional applications, such as a map, or self-expression, like many of the paintings which will be discussed in this thesis, it always includes an opinion, a perspective, an argument. Unlike other human interactions with nature, landscape painting involves an element of explicit imitation, a landscape painting is always connected, visually or conceptually, with the physical land; the artificial object is made to represent the natural phenomenon. As we will see, the contradiction of endowing a synthetic creation with the meaning and significance of a natural space is one which many cultures have struggled to resolve; despite how accurate the imitation is, the transition from natural to artificial automatically creates conflict.

Understanding that argument is the key to unlocking the puzzle which landscape paintings are: they reveal how a culture conceives of nature, and therefore of themselves.

Landscape painting is a unique lens through which to study how a culture relates to nature. That relationship speaks volumes about how the culture conceives of and interacts with a universal human environment and helps clarify how humanity experiences space and place. The way a culture or society treats and thinks of nature can reveal deeply human values: notions of morality, truth, and self. It suggests principles or relationships that cultures uphold: how we treat nature is often reflective or related to how we treat each other and of how we cultivate a sense of self.

The historic study of the conception of nature also uncovers trends, similarities, and differences in how the course of human history has shaped how we see and relate to nature. By examining how certain attitudes formed in various places over time, patterns of relation and correlation suggest themselves. A comparison of how different cultures process conceptions of nature and, more specifically, how they develop landscape painting and its meaning can shed light on the interplay between history, nature, and humanity.

The choice of comparison between the paintings of the Hudson River School and of the Song dynasty was no coincidence. Both America and China have discrete and identifiable landscape painting traditions. However, the story and theory of each contrasts in revealing and instructive ways. In the case of America, a traceable history begins in the early seventeenth century and has specific names and paintings attached to its development. The Chinese tradition of painting landscapes stretches back much further than that of America; artists have produced landscape art since at least the Zhou dynasty (1946-256 BCE). Although artists of both traditions define their works as landscape paintings, the styles which they produce are radically different. But most importantly, theories which arise from each tradition are remarkably alike yet subtly dissimilar. By choosing these two lineages of art, I hoped to pair two well-defined and copiously studied histories. Each school came about at a different time, in a different place, and produced widely different styles of painting with similar subject matter. And yet, despite the gulf in geography, time, and style, these two drastically different painting traditions arrive at similar ideals. In

drawing parallels between these seemingly disparate traditions, I hope to bring to light broad themes and lessons about humanity's conceptions of nature, how they develop, and what they say about us.

The parameters of this study were set by its context. This is a senior thesis, and thus can only cover so much ground. I chose to focus on two central primary texts, one from each tradition. I decided that a close reading of texts which covered broad discussions of landscape art - including theory, form, history, and criticism - would be the best way to extract explicit and implicit conceptions of nature as sacred, demonstrated in landscape painting. To that extent, I arrived at two texts - Asher B. Durand's *Letters on Landscape Painting* and Guo Xi's *Linchuan gaozhi* (林泉高致) or *The Lofty Message of Forests and Streams* - which were each representative of their era and most strongly pertained to my needs. Each text was produced by a respected and much-cited master in their field; these texts have been highlighted repeatedly by different generations for their importance in their respective traditions. I chose to focus on these texts rather than paintings because they more directly state the values and messages each tradition propounded. Furthermore, they can explicitly speak to a wide range of themes and topics that are implicit in paintings. Using these primary sources as a base, I extended my research outward, looking for other primary sources and secondary sources which supplemented the information discussed in the central texts. The sources I draw from include books, websites, museum catalogues, paintings, and encyclopedia entries.

What follows is a brief comparison of nineteenth-century American landscape painting, as embodied by the Hudson River School, and twelfth-century Chinese landscape painting, particularly that of the Song dynasty (960-1279 CE), as understood and written about in the two central texts. Each tradition has a section of history and close reading. The Hudson River School and Asher B. Durand's *Letters on Landscape Painting* will come first, followed by the Song dynasty painters and Guo Xi's *The Lofty Message of Forests and Streams*. The thesis will conclude with a comparison and analysis of select paintings from each tradition.

Over the course of this thesis, I hope to raise and answer questions like, what makes nature sacred? What form does that sacredness take, and how does it come about? What factors lead to certain associations with nature? How do religious or philosophical concepts influence perceptions of nature? What historic or cultural occurrences shape the development of human relations with nature? How do ideas of sacredness dictate and translate into human action? Can different cultures have the same or similar ideas of sacred and nature? How do landscape paintings reflect conceptions of nature and convey sacredness? How do rhetoric and rules surrounding the practice of landscape painting reveal sacred values? When and why are people drawn to landscape painting? How did these cultures conceive of and treat these paintings – the process of their production, their commercial values, and the experience of viewing them? Why did China's landscape painting tradition form differently than that of America? What relations did each movement have to one another, if any at all? Some of these questions may be answered, others may lead to more questions. By performing this analysis, I hope to stimulate curiosity and discussion, and hopefully some interest in the magnificent art of these two traditions.

American Landscape Painting

Setting the Stage

The nineteenth-century American landscape-painting tradition, which the Hudson River School embodied, descended from a lineage that branched off from Europe. Landscape paintings, where the landscape takes prominence and holds independent significance in the picture (rather than being decoration or set-piece design), did not develop until after the Renaissance began (during the 1400's). Slowly and steadily, landscape grew to a formidable movement in painting. As the eighteenth century began, landscape painting had accumulated enough attention to be considered a major art genre in Europe, although it still lacked the critical backing and prestige which history painting and portraiture had achieved. In the eighteenth century the productive centers of the European landscape-painting world expanded to England and France, in addition to the Netherlands and Italy ("Landscape Painting" n.d.).

Developing tastes in England and France encouraged an expanding market for landscape art (ibid). It would take major cultural shifts to foster the attitude necessary for landscape painting to rise to a place of prominence and respect in the Western art world: the rise of Romanticism.

One of the most important cultural developments to spur life and draw general intellectual and cultural interest in nature (as well as being a major instigator of the Romantic movement) was Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1756). The treatise, which began a period of obsession with the Sublime[1] in Western philosophy and art, spread an interest in savage and violent nature. Crucially, it created a paradigm of sacredness that was devoid of religious language or imagery; a fascination with nature as impressed on personal experience and emotion was the source of this new sacred - ideas which were essential in the coming Romantic movement. Burke's description of the effects of nature on the individual exposed these ideas, "The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature, when those causes operate most powerful Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended with some degree of horror...the effect of the sublime in its highest degree; the inferior effects are admiration, reverence and respect," (Clewis 2019, 80). The effect of nature, in its overpowering majesty, is astonishment, suggesting some greater form of appreciation for nature, something close to awe, worship, sacredness. Neoclassicism, the movement which immediately preceded and ran concurrently with Romanticism, had focused on reason and produced art and theory which was seen as too cerebral and inhuman, removed from the common experience. It was supplanted by Romanticism which restored spirituality to people's lives through sublime, awesome nature. As Sweet remarks,

> Nature which medievalists had regarded as sinful, perhaps because the pagan gods of nature were incompatible with Christianity, now became fully 'respectable,'…[and] could be admired for its own sake. Romanticists believed that nature could do no wrong, while the classicists thought nature in the raw was chaotic and must be put in order before it could be considered beautiful, (Sweet 1945, 8).

[1] Burke defined the sublime as, "Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling," (Clewis 2019, 79).

Landscape painters found expression of this raw natural spirit in all corners of the European continent: foreboding mountains, tumultuous storms, and wild pastures all drew artistic interest. Although landscape painting as a genre did not yet enjoy critical and commercial success, the late eighteenth century refined and expanded the movement, setting the stage for landscape painting to break out into the mainstream (ibid). Burke's theorizing on the sublime and the complex shifting socio-political landscape of the eighteenth century paved the way for Romanticism.

Romantic Ideals

One of the most intense and ubiquitous waves of naturalistic fascination in the Western world manifested itself during the Romantic period. The Romantic period refers to a time generally placed between the 1780's and the 1850's. The period was characterized by a literary, philosophical, artistic, and political movement termed Romanticism, which emphasized experience over reason, emotion over intellect, and which promoted values like individualism, and nationalism.

Scholar have debated the events which led to the flowering of Romanticism. Some say it was a reaction to the Industrial Revolution, others posit Romanticism as a response to Enlightenment or Neoclassical ideas which had pervaded European thought and art before the Revolution. Many scholars point to two defining moments which announced the Romantic period and the ideologies it embodied.[4] The French Revolution (and the American Revolution), which itself crested a wave of anti-authoritarianism and marked a rising surge in nationalism across the European-American world, was one such marker (Day 2012, 1). The Revolution was a turning point in European and American politics: monarchies, following a long period of decline, were no longer in vogue; the people would rule now. Not only did this expose the nationalistic zeal which swept France and the newly christened United States of

[4] Whether these were the instigators or merely milestones is debated: Romantic themes in literature, art and philosophy appeared before the 1780's and would continue to do so afterwards. These events have been chosen retroactively, and perhaps with some bias or intention.

America, it also hinted at the coming artistic and intellectual obsession with the common-man's experience, the idea of the mundane, the humble, as honorable and desirable. Humanism was spreading.

The other such marker is generally considered to be the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), a book of poetry written by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (Day 2012, 1). It, too, was a milestone of ideological change which announced the Romantic ideals of the modest, every day, and an obsession with nature that bordered on religious. William Wordsworth, in the preface to the second edition (1802), stated the first of these changes: "The principal object…in these Poems was to make the incidents of common life interesting," (Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Roe 2005, 289). No longer were the stories of kings and heroes of popular intellectual and artistic interest, as had been the case in Neoclassicism; the common man was to take center-stage in the new age of literature, art, and philosophy. Wordsworth explains the reasons for this shift, "the necessary character of rural occupations are more easily comprehended; and are more durable; and lastly, because in that situation the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature," (ibid, 290). The rural and simple - life led by the common man - Wordsworth implies, was a purer expression of the human spirit; it allowed for free expression of emotion and opinion, in contrast to the complex social constraints imposed by urban-society. Wordsworth also hailed the rural life because of its relationship with nature. We begin to see a connection between nature and morality: those closest to nature are those most capable of living and expressing honest emotion and thought.[6] Taken together, the French Revolution and *Lyrical Ballads* provide convenient signposts indicating the arrival of the Romantic period. They demonstrate the values of individualism, nature admiration, and experience which characterized much of the Romantic era art and philosophy.

By further examining these facets of Romantic beliefs, the historical context of landscape paintings and the concept of nature as sacred during the nineteenth century crystalizes. One step which led to nature being thought of as sacred was a cultural current that shifted the primary understanding of

[6] These beliefs stemmed from a reaction against industrialization, which will be explained in greater detail below.

truth from logic- and reason-based (empirical) to being grounded in experience. Ralph Waldo Emerson, the preeminent American Romanticist, describes the difference between the reason-based and the experiential-based thinker in his speech *The Transcendentalist*,[7]

> As thinkers, mankind have ever divided into two sects, Materialists and Idealists; the first class founding on experience, the second on consciousness; the first class beginning to think from the data of the senses, the second class perceive that the senses are not final…The materialist insists on facts, on history, on the force of circumstances and the animal wants of man; the idealist on the power of Thought and of Will, on inspiration, on miracle, on individual culture, (Spiller 1978, 98).

Emerson draws the distinction between Romantic thinkers (whom he terms idealists) and empirical thinkers (materialists). He goes on to lambast the materialists as being misguided in placing final importance on the factuality of existence, clutching to some evidence of empirical truth. Emerson, and many Romanticists, found that such stubborn insistence on sensory evidence was naive and misleading; truth was to be found in personal experience. Emerson says of the idealist,

> He does not deny the presence of this table, this chair…but he looks at these things as the reverse side of the tapestry, as the *other end*, each being a sequel or completion of a spiritual fact which nearly concerns him. This manner of looking at things transfers every object in nature from an independent and anomalous position without there, into the consciousness (ibid, p.99).

Romantic thinkers did not deny the materiality of existence, of natural phenomenon, but believed that the truth of existence was felt, perceived, experienced. There was no ultimate external truth; personal experience dictated perception, and therefore reality and truth.

When truth is so personal, emotion is essential in processing reality. When existence is interpreted through reason and logic, perspective and emotion are actively stripped from analysis; objects and places have no room for emotional or spiritual truths because they are scrutinized for their most universal, undebatable evidence.[8] By contrast, existence when interpreted through experience encourages

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[7] A Lecture read at the Masonic Temple in Boston, Massachusetts in January 1842.

[8] One consequence of this, John Ruskin notes, is that emotion, experience, spirituality "is apt to get separated from the life of nature; and imagining our God upon a cloudy Throne, far above the Earth, and not in the flowers or Waters, we approach the invisible things with a theory that they are dead, governed by physical laws," (Ruskin and Cust 1906, 168). Elements of the subjective experience are not included in the scientific understanding of truth – the sacred is removed from materiality.

perspective and emotion, filtering understanding through subjective lenses and acknowledging bias. This understanding of reality allows for emotion and extra-superficial truths to be layered onto objects and places.

The artistic communities leapt on this epistemological development, using the imagery of the world to convey personal emotion and truth. The human figure was not needed to convey feeling or message; meaning could be abstracted through imagery and effect. Landscape artists exemplified the freedom of expression granted by the removal of the empirical lens of understanding.

Pre-Romantic landscapists had already begun to tip the movement in that direction. From the likes of Nicolas Poussin, Claude Lorrain, and Richard Wilson came the Idealized landscape: Neoclassical portrayals of scenes or figures against increasingly lush and expressive landscapes, usually some mythic rendition of antiquity. Innovators of the seventeenth century like Poussin and Lorrain attempted to elevate landscape's value in the art world by attaching meaning and metaphor to landscapes, drawing attention and focus to the landscapes in which scenes were set, and emphasizing the effects of nature over humanity ("Landscape Painting | Art" n.d.). Romantic landscape painters in the late eighteenth century would consciously positioning themselves in contrast with these early French, Italian, and English painters, realigning the Neoclassical work with the new Romantic ideals, moving nature to the fore and making the human secondary.

Through the works of several artists, including Caspar David Friedrich, John Constable, and J.M.W. Turner, landscape went through a series of transformations. These artists, and many of their compatriots, saw landscapes as vessels for impressions, emotions, and stories - capable of all the expression and symbolism that a human figure can convey, embody, and evoke. Friedrich was notable because, "Throughout Western art it had been accepted that landscape could be made meaningful only by peopling it with some human event. Now, however, Friedrich was choosing as his protagonists the elements of the landscape themselves," (Vaughan, 2020). Constable innovated through his "six-footers", landscapes painted on six-foot canvases; large-canvased landscapes were revolutionary because they employed scales and sizes, implied grandeur and spectacle which were previously reserved for history

painting, bolstering the reputation of landscapes. “Turner’s ambition was to confirm the status of landscape as a serious art form,” he expanded the semiotic capabilities of landscape art into the spheres occupied by history painting (“Landscape Painting” n.d.). Like those of Friedrich, Turner’s landscapes told stories and communicated existential truths; his interpretive style (such as impressionistic brush work and thematic imagery) supported subjective understandings of reality and the emotional capabilities of landscapes.

An example of the work which was so important in the transformation of the genre, in elevating it and instilling the value of sacredness in nature, is found in one of Friedrich’s first major works, *Cross in the Mountains* (1808). Using nothing but dramatic lighting, trees, sky, and a cross, Friedrich creates a painting which was much more than just a pretty picture of a mountain; without resorting to supernatural imagery or events, Friedrich made a holy artwork based in the language of nature.[9]

Another critical development during the Romantic period which placed further emphasis on nature was the shifting political and cultural views of the time (whether they motivated Romanticism or were a product of it is debatable). Three interlocking aspects are particularly relevant here: a reaction against the industrial revolution, increased disdain for urban life and bourgeois values, and a rise in nationalistic sentiment - particularly in the United States. The Industrial Revolution began in Britain in the late eighteenth century (“History of Europe - The Industrial Revolution” n.d.). Advances in manufacturing technology led to a boom in commercial activity that, coupled with expanding populations which increasingly turned to manufacturing for work, led to a swelling of urban populations. The social, economic, and political upheaval which resulted from rapid and massive change inevitably caused socio-economic chafing. Many became disillusioned with city life, and the “wonders” of the mechanical world, which was rapidly spreading to all corners of society. The Romantic period coincided with this reaction and reflected the displeasure of many urbanites with their new circumstances. An excerpt from Charlotte Smith’s *The Emigrants* (1793) provides a perfect example of such a reaction,

[9] It is no surprise *Cross in the Mountains* is so spiritually charged - it was the first ever landscape painting commissioned as an altarpiece.

> As one, who long
> Has dwelt amid the artificial scenes
> Of populous City, deems that splendid shows,
> The Theatre, and pageant pomp of Courts,
> Are only worth regard; forgets all taste
> For Nature's genuine beauty; (Day 2012, 38)

City life and the trappings of civilization began to feel stifling; urban living, which grew increasingly crowded and noisy, extravagant, and artificial, was met by many with disdain. Those who wanted to break free of the strict orders and close quarters were reminded of the wide-open freedom of nature (Barratt n.d.). Romantic artists, poets and philosophers were put off by the rapid pace of change, seeing it as a corrupting force.

Thomas Cole, the founder of the Hudson River School, says so in an essay titled *American Scenery* (1836):

> In this age, when a meagre utilitarianism seems ready to absorb every feeling and sentiment, and what is sometimes called improvement in its march makes us fear that the bright and tender flowers of the imagination shall be crushed beneath its iron tramp, it would be well to cultivate the oasis that yet remains to us, and thus preserve the germs of a future and a purer system, (Cole 1980, 6).

Nature was a pure source, a moral compass which was being misaligned by civil interests. Disenchantment with metropolitan life can indicate many underlying anxieties: loss of individuality among throngs of like-minded people, disconnect from a community, indifference to individual opinion and emotion. Dell Upton, in his chapter "The Urban Ecology of Art in Antebellum New York," points out that Romanticism in art and literature "was largely an urban phenomenon" (2015, 49). Since much of the culture (art, literature, philosophy, politics, etc.) in which these movements occurred was located in cities - most of the patrons, exhibits, social circles which consumed and supported the development of such ideas - Romanticism naturally pertained to and resonated predominantly with urbanites. Urban anxieties contributed to the spirit of individuality and the emotional, personal nature of the Romantic movement.

Although American cities had yet to reach the density of Europe's, ideas and patterns often crossed the Atlantic; Americans began to feel urban repulsion as well.[11] Again, Ralph Waldo Emerson provides for the American voice,

> Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint-stock company, in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion. It loves not realities and creators, but names and customs, (Spiller 1978, 242-243).

The contempt for industrial standards drips from Emerson's words. He berates the rising commercialization and industrialization of city life. Commodification of every aspect of living came into view with the Industrial Revolution; structure absorbed the individual's life, leisure became unproductive, time was bargained with, individuality was worthless. Emerson spoke for many in his disgust at the exploitation of people by industry leaders and businesses. William Blake's *The Chimney Sweeper* (1794) is another exemplary poem which speaks on the dehumanizing and corrupting effects of the industrial revolution, this time on the use of child labor.[12] Such views being popular among the urban class inevitably led to an infatuation and glamorization of nature, the antithesis of industrial society.

Nature became a sanctuary from the crowded city streets, an antidote to the poisoning effects of industrial urban life. In nature, people could free their own experience, dictate their needs and desires, guide their hand and interest. Emerson says, "In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life…which nature cannot repair," (Spiller 1978, 182). Nature became more than a space, it became a haven, a cure, a personal salve. No longer was nature the wild, untamable wilderness

[11] New York City - the bedrock of the Hudson River School - was the prime example of urban explosion in action: "a city with a population of 32,000 at the time of the ratification of the Constitution in 1788 had grown to about 150,000 by the time the Erie Canal was opened in 1825, and soared to 813,000 by 1860," (Upton 2015, 49).

[12] In the poem, one child-worker has a dream in which former chimney-sweeper-children locked in coffins are freed by an angel who releases them "Then down a green plain, leaping, laughing they run, And wash in a river and shine in the Sun." The contrast between industrial morbidity and natural freedom is stark and unmistakable.

of the Middle Ages or early colonial American period; in the early nineteenth century, nature was a sacred place, where one found oneself and a way of being (Sweet 1945, 8).[13]

Such an attitude inevitably bred dissidents to the municipal way of life. Emerson hints at a trend which would sound familiar to certain Chinese scholars: "It is a sign of our times…that many intelligent and religious persons withdraw themselves from the common labors and competitions of the market and the caucus, and betake themselves to a certain solitary and critical way of living…they prefer to ramble in the country and perish of ennui," (Spiller 1978, 104). Like Chinese dissenting politicians in the late Tang period, American scholars and politicians abandoned what seemed to them to be a corrupt society to better themselves in the systems of nature. Emerson suggests that increasing amounts of admirable people renounced city life - in protest or defeat – to indulge in a simple and humble existence in nature. (Henry David Thoreau is a prime example of such a scholar and is emblematic of the American Transcendental movement.) In response to industrialization and shifts in urban life, Nature at once became a spiritual, mental, moral, philosophical, political, and artistic inspiration and sanctuary.

Along with the swell of metropolitan life and the harried drive of industrialism grew a nationalistic sentiment. This is particularly true of the United States of America: having successfully thrown off its monarchical shackles in the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783), the United States was swelling with pride and boundless energy. In addition to the already sizable territory along the East coast of the continent, the Louisiana Purchase (1803) doubled the nation's size; America's boundaries seemed endless. A flow of nationalistic spirit poured into the land; not only was the landscape now certifiably American, its untamed inland acres needed American settlers; it became the nation's manifest destiny to inhabit the wilderness. Catherine Albenese, in her study *Nature Religion in America,* elaborates:

> Nature functioned in republican religion in three related ways. First…nature meant New World innocence and vigor, the purity and wholesomeness of clean country living on the edge of an empowering wilderness. Second…[nature] moved according to unfailing law, and -

[13] William Wordsworth in his poem *Lines written in early spring* writes, "To her fair works did nature link The human soul that through me ran; And much it griev'd my heart to think What man has made of man," (Day 2012, 35).

> corresponding to it - the universal law that grounded human rights and duties within the body politic...a third meaning…was the sublimity of a wilderness terrain. Taught to recognize the quality of the sublime, they lifted mind and emotion to higher realities, infusing landscape with mingled awe and admiration and even with astonishment that verged on terror. Still more, in a peculiarly republican aesthetic that separated them from Old World vision, these Americans learned to understand the sublimity of what they saw as a sign of the stature and destiny of the new nation. Even nature had smiled her beneficence on the grand political experiment the patriots had begun. She had prepared the choicest portions of the planet - indeed, the most mammoth and stupendous portions - as the space for republican government, (1991, 50, 58).

For early nineteenth-century Americans, nature was a muse, a teacher, a symbol of pride, a moral paradigm, [17] and an indication of their destiny. [18] It was something America had in abundance. Unlike Europe, which had less uncultivated land and relied on its extensive cultural history for national pride, America was a new nation with a relatively undeveloped culture. Rather than basing their pride on a culture which was not fully articulated, Americans used nature as the bedrock of their nationalist honor. In addition to the already heavy pressures exerted by the industrial revolution and urban crush, Americans were pushed to nature out of nationalistic duty and patriotic inspiration.

It is not difficult to imagine the sacredness nature held for Americans. Albenese reiterates, "The wilderness was nature in its most unsullied form…it was the place par excellence where God could manifest himself," (1991, 59). Nature was an explicitly religious space.[20] Nature was a divine place for the Romantic American, simultaneously a symbol of their own virtue and value as well as a sacred space of instruction and moral soul-seeking. Indeed, Emerson says of his experience in nature, "I am part or parcel of God" (Spiller 1978, 182). It is easy to see how such added layers of meaning pushed American artists to idealize nature, to saturate their work with the richest essence of those meanings. It was

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[17] The Declaration of Independence, America's founding document, cited "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God" as the basis for their civil system.

[18] The recurring theme in the Star-Spangled Banner - America's national anthem, written in 1814 by Francis Scott Key, "O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave." The land itself was endowed with and a symbol of American spirit: free & brave.

[20] The struggle to maintain natural sacred spaces against the influence of industry and expanding civilization was evident on a national level: the Yosemite Grant (1864) was an act of Congress, signed by President Abraham Lincoln, the first occurrence of park land being designated for preservation and public use by federal action amid the rising concerns of commercial interest in the land. It set a precedent for the creation of the first national park, Yellowstone, which shortly followed in 1872 (Schama 1996, 7).

something to be confronted as an individual - separated from the undiscriminating masses of the city - where they seek emotional and moral solace and guidance, and a patriotic engagement with the spirit of their newfound national destiny.

It was into this rich web of meaning that landscape painting, and the Hudson River School, emerged in full bloom in American art.

The Golden Age of American Landscapes

Landscape painting came into its own as an art form in the nineteenth century. Edmund Burke's influential treatise had inspired a wave of obsession with nature in Western thinkers throughout Europe and America. Against the backdrop of European industrialization, artists and art collectors alike discovered a newfound fascination with the *sublime*. Artists such as Caspar David Friedrich, John Constable, and J.M.W. Turner sought meaning through symbolism in their landscapes and expanded and elevated the field of landscape painting. Landscape was suddenly endowed with the capacity to express and elicit profound and visceral emotion, a wide-open space, a basin for expression and experience. It was in this climate that the Hudson River School arose, the first great all-American art movement.

The trends and styles which were in vogue in Europe almost inevitably arrived with similar fanfare in the United States, due to constant trade, travel, and political and cultural exchange (Sweet 1945, 5–6). Romantic ideas were one of those concepts carried across the water (Albanese 1991, 58). The rhetoric of the sublime included a certain perspective on nature, praised it for its ability to inspire emotion and stimulate experience which were hard to find in urban society. Nature's ability to affect such feelings endowed it with a certain reverence, a sacredness which derived from the Romantic ideals at the time. The newly consecrated United States of America added another layer of sacred meaning to nature: a reflection and an indication of the greatness of the nation. So, it was no wonder that landscape painting became popular in the United States just a few years after it exploded in Europe. As the movement crossed the Atlantic, it entered a country ripe with pride, growing nationalism, and a sense of self-importance.

Prior to 1800, few examples of pure landscape paintings (devoid of human figures) exist from the United States or Europe, and those which are recorded were received with little attention and even less financial support (Sweet 1945, 10). However, as the nineteenth century commenced, cultural tectonic shifts were underway in the United States, "America's interest in her scenic wonders gradually developed into a philosophy of nature…completely formulated in the works of Henry Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson…This philosophy of nature was to be expressed after 1825 by the landscape painters, who looked upon the scene before them as something far more than an exciting view," (Sweet 1945, 11).

Although obsession with nature in the arts world was coming around, it was not until 1825 that any substantial presence of landscape painters established itself in the United States. That year, Thomas Cole, an English-born landscape specialist, settled in New York and became the founding member of what would be referred to as the Hudson River School.

The most significant body of American landscape painters found definition and direction in the form of the Hudson River School. The Hudson River School was not exactly a school; the artists traditionally referred to as belonging to it did not attend a singular academy, coordinate style and subject matter, or even practice the same type of artistic technique - although they did learn from, share and admire each other's works.[21] Some consider it a period of time - most of the works produced by the Hudson River School were completed in the early 1800's, fading from the artistic spotlight in the late 1870's (Sweet 1945, 12). The School was a collection of American landscapists (some were foreign, particularly English, transplants to the United States) who dominated the American art market and cultural psyche with their rapturous and reverential paintings of America's natural beauty. Every member had a distinct style; some focused on epic-scale depictions of the sublime magnitude of landscapes, others preferred intimate, peaceful, and contemplative scenery. Some worked in allegory and symbolism, still more approached nature head-on, producing matter-of-fact portrayals.

[21] Although they did not paint the same, they certainly socialized among themselves. Many were members of the National Academy of Design, they attended the same clubs (particularly the Century), and even worked at the same address (the Studio Building on West Tenth Street, New York, New York) (A. K. J. Avery n.d.). Many of them built their houses along the Hudson River as well (ibid).

The Hudson River School is generally split into two generations. The first generation of artists, which started with Thomas Cole and included Asher B. Durand, were Romantic purists at heart: they sought to capture nature in all its emotive and expressive capacities, and they tended to include thematic or narrative elements in their paintings. They were popular but never achieved celebrity status during their time. After the 1850's and the death of Thomas Cole (1848), the second generation of Hudson River School artists arose. These artists, including Albert Bierstadt and Eliza Pratt Greatorex, were much more successful and attracted more attention and financial support. They tended to make sensational landscapes, extraordinary vistas which dazzled and inspired but less frequently commented on theme or narrative.

Hudson River School artists were not tethered to the Hudson River. The Hudson River - a 315-mile river originating in the Adirondack mountains and emptying into the Upper New York Bay - happened to be where the School's founding members began their artistic journeys. However, the artists who eventually became known under that label travelled far and wide throughout the United States and even abroad to find inspiration and subject matter. The Northeast remained a popular domain for Hudson River School painters, especially for those of the first generation, and many wrote of their love for the tranquility of the Vermont forests and the natural majesty of the Catskill mountains (Cole 1980); but the irresistible immensity of the American West naturally drew the insatiable appetite of Romantic landscapists, particularly those of the second generation. And, as was natural with almost all artists of the Western tradition, travel to Europe was often encouraged, and a fair share of Hudson River School artists, with sponsorship from various patrons, made the voyage across the sea to gain tutelage and inspiration from European landscapes and artists (Sweet 1945, 57). Even in the height of American landscape art, the land being painted was never exclusively American.

The Hudson River School canonically began with the arrival and establishment of Thomas Cole in New York. Following a sponsored trip up the Hudson River, Cole displayed three landscapes painted during his trip in the window of his studio (Sweet 1945, 57). These paintings drew the attention of three men, John Trumbull, Asher B. Durand, and William Dunlap, who would become important figures in the

School themselves, each of whom bought a landscape for twenty-five dollars apiece (ibid). Cole and his contemporaries' work quickly gained traction in the American art market; commissions from wealthy patrons rolled in, and landscapes began to appear in homes and art galleries across the United States.

A number of artists followed quickly in the wake of Cole's break-out success. Harriet Cany Peale, Edward Mitchell Bannister, Susie M. Barstow, Sanford Robinson Gifford, and George Innes to name but a few, all found success in the golden age of American landscape painting. The various accomplishments dispersed amongst these waves of artists attest to the height of American creative and Romantic engagement with the sacred in nature. These artists, spurred on by commercial and institutional support, captured in painted strokes the spirit of the age - one which indulged and pursued religion in nature. Together they visualized the natural obsessions of nineteenth-century America, Romantic and nationalistic, seeing landscape for more than the soil it stood on.

One of leading lights of the Hudson River School was Asher Brown Durand. Durand's stature in the art world is both large and largely forgotten. Among his various accomplishments are founding and serving as president of the National Academy of Design,[23] engraving United States currency, and producing portraits of American presidents. Although he was older than Cole, Durand's rise as a landscape artist came after that of Cole. His landscape-painting career ultimately produced few remembered masterpieces, but he left his impression on American landscape painting through his work and writing. After Thomas Cole's death in 1848, he was considered the most significant American landscape artist, but Durand and his work faded quickly from public memory after the Civil War (Peck 2005, 689). Durand's *Letters on Landscape Painting*, written at the height of his landscape phase and while serving as President of the National Academy of Design, put into words the artistic sentiment which pervaded America and speaks to the relationship artists had with nature.

Asher B. Durand's *Letters on Landscape Painting*

[23] A leading institution in the American art world to this day. More information can be found at their website: https://www.nationalacademy.org/

Of the writing to come from the artists of the Hudson River School, one collection stands as a manifesto and a testament to all the nineteenth century American landscape artists' approach to capturing sacredness in nature. Asher B. Durand's *Letters on Landscape Painting* lay out in a series of articles the technical, theoretical, theological beliefs and the guiding principles of the Hudson River School; he touches on everything from artistic politics, religion, philosophy, and more. Although the primary goal of the letters was a technical guide by which an aspiring artist could depict nature, Durand communicated beliefs and theories which attest to artistic and cultural sentiment at the time. The result is a thorough pronouncement of many of the core ideologies which American landscapists held and which, when considered in context, shed light on the sacred status of nature in American culture during the nineteenth century. [24]

The *Letters* were published in *The Crayon*, a short-lived art publication of the 1800's. First published on January 3rd, 1855, *The Crayon* was a monthly journal which aimed at "the education of our countrymen to the perception and enjoyment of Beauty," ("Introductory" 1855). It featured articles from many notable authors, including preeminent art critic and avid defender of the landscape movement John Ruskin, and covered a range of topics such as exhibition reviews, opinion pieces, art gossip, and developments in the artistic and literary world. *The Crayon* ended publication in 1861. The *Letters on Landscape Painting* appear in a series of nine issues, dating January 3rd, 17th, 31st, February 14th, March 7th, April 4th, May 2nd, June 6th and July 11th, 1855. In his first *Letter*, Durand begins with a general defense of nature as an object of art and method of education. In the second he details how to approach the study of nature. In the third Durand continues his instruction on how to study nature but also marks the distinction of what makes an outstanding piece of art. In the fourth *Letter* he describes the effect good landscape painting can have on the viewer. In the fifth of the *Letters on Landscape Painting* Durand continues his technical instructions and elaborates on the difference between imitation and representation

[24] It is safe to say that these landscape artists were speaking for American popular culture as well. Artists like Frederic Ewen Church were followed like paparazzi and their works and writings were broadcast across the country. Landscape painting dominated the art world (K. J. Avery et al. 1987, 5)

in art. In the sixth and seventh *Letters* he lays out a theory of color in landscape painting. In the eighth Durand discusses the differences between Idealism and Realism in art. And in the last *Letter* he closes with some finishing notes on technique and final words on the beauty of nature.

What follows is a close reading of select sections of these nine letters. In studying these letters, I hope to clarify how Hudson River School artists perceived nature. I want to answer questions like how did these artists approach and perceive nature? How was nature sacred and, if so, how did these artists express this sentiment? Why was nature so important to these artists? What did nature mean to artists and art appreciators during the nineteenth century? What place did artistic practice hold in propagating the idea that nature is sacred? By concentrating on these selected highlights, I hope to demonstrate how artists (and art admirers) conceived of nature as sacred and what that conception implied for behavior and attention towards it. These selections were made based on relevance to the subject of this thesis, namely understanding nature as sacred, and as such will not focus on specific technical instructions (which abound in these letters). Although these technical aspects are important and relevant to the history and development of landscape art, they are not as pertinent to the topic as the beliefs which are expressed within their lines.

The first *Letter* appears on the first page of the first issue of the first volume of *The Crayon*. The prominent position given to Durand's piece tells of the popularity of landscape painting at the time. A note from the editors which precedes the text of the first letter explains, “The numerous applications of young artists to Mr. Durand to be admitted into his studio as pupils, has suggested to him to reply at length through THE CRAYON for the benefit of all who have been, or might be hereafter, applicants for the like privilege,” (Durand 1855a). So popular was the demand to learn the landscape arts that Durand was inclined to write a beginner’s guide which might be able to circulate widely and satiate the growing numbers of aspiring landscapists.

He begins with a brief note, giving context for the letters by addressing a hypothetical student who applied to his studio, “I am compelled to return an unfavorable answer to your application for admission into my studio as a pupil…by way of encouragement, some remarks resulting from my own

experience under circumstances similar to your own," (Durand 1855a). Durand starts with one of the most fundamental realizations an artist can achieve,

> You need not a period of pupilage in an artist's studio to learn to paint; books and the casual intercourse with artists, accessible to every respectable young student, will furnish you with all the essential mechanism of the art. I suppose that you possess the necessary knowledge of drawing, and can readily express with the lead pencil the forms and general character of real objects. Then, let me earnestly recommend to you one STUDIO which you may freely enter, and receive in liberal measure the most sure and safe instruction ever meted to any pupil, provided you possess a common share of that truthful perception, which God gives to every true and faithful artist - the STUDIO of Nature, (Durand 1855a).

The concept of nature as a space for painting was a novel one. Despite seeming obvious, painting outside, surrounded by the elements one wished to capture, was not a common practice among Western landscape artists until the nineteenth century, and even then, was only done for part of the process. This direct exposure method of painting - also known as the Plein Air technique - was difficult and time-consuming for much of Western art history. Early Plein Air artists, such as John Constable, went to great lengths in pursuit of direct access to inspiration. Because Western art utilized mostly color-based oil painting, paint had to be made by grinding and mixing dry pigments with oil to create the color of oil paint required; keeping the fresh-made paint from drying was a continuous fight against the will of nature (Tate n.d.).[25] The invention of the paint tube by John G. Rand in 1841 revolutionized painting. Artists could now store paints for longer, bring more paints farther distances, and create new colors (ibid). Although artists were now able to complete more of the planning and painting process outdoors - sketches, oil studies, perhaps even some outlining - the finished piece was ultimately completed inside a studio. Durand was among the first American artists to champion this technique. The direct exposure to nature, as Durand will explain, was essential to the development of an excellent landscapist.

Also evident is Durand's disdain for the belief that an artist's studio is the only place to learn how to perform art. Durand makes a distinction between the representation skills which an artist can have (to

[25] Some artists tackled these challenges by making the paints at a studio and storing them in pig's bladder which was sealed with a string; to extract the paint, the bladder would be pricked with a needle or tack and paint would ooze out (Tate n.d.). But this was problematic firstly, because there was no failsafe method to reseal the pouches and secondly, because the bladders were liable to explode (ibid).

"express with the lead pencil the forms and general character of real objects") and another type of artistic knowledge outside technical skill. This division in artistic ability is nothing new, it was the claim that intuitive artistic skill could be derived from nature which was revolutionary in Durand and other Naturalists' works. This distinction between mechanical knowledge and experiential knowledge rings of Romanticism. The strict adherence to observable phenomenon and unbiased data stifled Romanticists. Durand was voicing the Romantic ideal of experiential learning when he praised the lessons which the studio of nature could impart as compared to those of the artist's studio.

Earlier in the first of the *Letters*, Durand says of studio tutelage, "[the student is] in danger of losing his own identity, and from the habit of seeing with the eyes and following in the track of his master, become in the end what is most degrading in the mind of every true artist, a mere imitator," (Durand 1855a). A general critique of artistic heritage and mentorial practice, Durand's criticism is especially pertinent to landscape painting whose subject is outside the studio. The artist's studio had its limits, long tested and tried, whereas the natural world was full of lessons ready to give and largely unprobed as to its artistic insights. The critique is a uniquely Romantic one: by breaking with the training of another, one can find their own experience, their own truth. Durand reinforces the idea that society is not the best place to learn - nature, he argued, is a far better mentor. The technical checklist of artistic representational skills attracted much attention, but often at the expense of the creative spirit which separates art from imitation.

> Let him scrupulously accept *whatever* she [Nature] presents him, until he shall…have become intimate with her infinity, and then he may approach her on more familiar terms…never let him profane her sacredness by a willful departure from truth. It is for this reason that I would see you impressed, imbued to the full with *her* principles and practice, and after that develope the principles and practice of Art...For I maintain that all Art is unworthy and vicious which is at variance with Truth, and that only is worthy and elevated which impresses us with the same feelings and emotions that we experience in the presence of the Reality. True Art teaches the use of the embellishments which Nature herself furnishes, it never creates them…they are the luxuries of her store-house, and must be used with intelligence and discrimination to be wholesome and invigorating. If abused and adulterated by the poisons of conventionalism, the result will be the corruption of veneration for, and faith in the simple truths of Nature, which constitute the true Religion of Art, and the only safeguard against the inroads of heretical

conventionalism, (Durand 1855a).

Romanticism, with its emphasis on being in nature and deriving truth therein, obviously favors exposure to the natural world as inspiration and as a model. Durand, explaining nature's ability to supply artistic education, says "imbued with the true spirit to appreciate and enjoy the contemplation of her loveliness, he will approach her with veneration, and find in the conscientious study of her beauties all the great first principles of Art," (1855a). Such proximity to nature would not only allow for better vision and perception of nature, but would also, in theory, enliven the art itself with a breathing spirit, one which would not permeate in studio-made art. Furthermore, Durand suggests that "veneration" of nature, an appreciation of its sacredness, would naturally reveal artistic principles, naturally enlighten the artist (and the viewer).

Even more significant was the belief that the true essence of art derived from nature. Durand and other Romantic artists stressed the importance of deriving artistic inspiration and knowledge from its source: nature. Durand speaks to the Romantic attitude that society had perverted the human mind and manner. The larger context of this idea comes from the reaction against urbanization and rising industrialization which were exploding during the nineteenth century, upending many facets of life. Durand suggests the Romantic belief that a return to nature will purify not only art but the soul as well.[26]

Indeed, Durand's writing becomes polemic as he decries contemporary standard artistic practice, asking "is it not a truism admitted by all? Far from it!" (1855a). The denial of natural inspiration was pervasive.

> Or if it be admitted as a principle, it is constantly violated by the artist in his practice, and this violation sanctioned by the 'learned' critic and connoisseur…fine qualities of color without local meaning, and many other perversions of truth are made objects of artistic study, to the death of all

[26] Another point of interest, which cannot be fully indulged here, is the gendered language with which nature (and thus its opposite, civilization) is characterized. In this excerpt and in later *Letters*, Durand feminizes nature, assigning it female pronouns, comparing nature to a woman; by writing in such a manner, Durand reveals his influences and his inclinations. Nature, the feminine, has much to teach the artist who has long lived in the folds of industry or culture, by necessary contrast, the masculine domain. In this manner, Durand speaks to a long lineage of Western thought which places culture and society in the realm of the masculine and gives nature a feminine role. A generous reading might suggest that in evoking a return to nature, Durand is in one step decrying over-obsession with and submergence in culture and the masculine world. But this would be unsupported seeing as Durand writes little on any explicitly sexed topics.

true feeling for Art, - and all this under the name of improvements on Nature! (1855a).

His feelings of disgust with the clinical dissection and removal of the study of nature from Nature expressed in excited exclamations point to the sentiment that nature is the source of artistic (and greater) truths. The artistic community which claims to hold so dear the sacred value of artistic Truth and expression, had shown itself to be more than hypocritical in its lavish praises for the constructs of stale artistic principles. These artistic truths born in nature, when bred in the artist's studio, were allowed to become fermented under the reserved eye of the couture world. The fresh air, to Durand, would once again breathe life into soured practices.

Nature holds the secrets and meaning of art; like how a religious person may seek truth in a sacred text, a landscape painter (and appreciator), according to Hudson River School doctrine, should turn to nature as the holy sanctuary in which to find guidance and truth. Nature served as a non-denominational religious temple: people of all faiths and practices could come and find solace, but for the landscape artists, nature was the only place for religious practice. For Durand and the many he spoke for, nature was sacred, and it was essential to perceive and adhere to its principles.

In his second *Letter on Landscape Painting*, Durand begins to delve into the technical aspects of depicting nature. Even among his technical comments, an ideology of how to approach and perceive nature is visible which suggests the sacredness of nature. He begins with a restatement of the thesis of his previous letter, "I refer you to Nature early, that you may receive your first impressions of beauty and sublimity, unmingled with the superstitions of Art," (Durand 1855b). The specific terminology here is important to note; invoking the nineteenth century maxims of *beauty* and *sublime* is no accident. Many educated Americans would be familiar with the aesthetic and impressionistic division of beauty and sublime; philosophical writing, including works by Edmond Burke, Immanuel Kant, and Arthur Schopenhauer, had familiarized the distinction. It suffices to say here that these words and the complex webs of meaning they entail were part-and-parcel of artistic, religious, and cultural life at the time of

Durand's writing and his evocation of them here served to reinforce nature's connection to their meaning and legacy.

Amidst the explication of the practical rhetoric, Durand cannot help but indulge in his love of nature, pointing to its direct sacred significance,

> There is yet another motive for referring you to the study of Nature early - its influence on the mind and heart. The external appearance of this dwelling-place, apart from its wondrous structure and functions that minister to our well-being, is fraught with lessons of high and holy meaning, only surpassed by the light of Revelation. It is impossible to contemplate with right-minded, reverent feeling, its inexpressible beauty and grandeur, for ever assuming new forms of impressiveness under the varying phases of cloud and sun shine, time and season, without arriving at the conviction [that everything we see is full of the divine]…that the Great Designer of these glorious pictures has placed them before us as types of the Divine attributes, (Durand 1855b).

In this outpouring of natural adoration, Durand crystallized the Romanticists' deeply spiritual infatuation with nature. Indeed, nature, according to Durand, has direct influence over your psyche and soul ("mind and heart").[28] These two symbolic anatomical organs have long belonged to a separate sphere of influence. The mind, a byword for consciousness and the attributed logical center of a person, has been dominated by religious rhetoric ("Mind, n.1" n.d.). Shaping the mind is often done through biblical study (for Christians) or religious practice. Likewise, the heart, which is a stand-in for the soul, the culturally conceived emotional center of a person, has also for much of history been under the rhetorical control of various religious entities ("Heart, n., Int., and Adv." n.d.). Thus both the logical and emotional centers (lexically and conceptually) have long been the purview of religious institutions. By extracting these two symbolic terms, Durand draws intentional connections between nature and religion, placing control of the mind and heart in the lush hands of nature. Durand extends the religious definition to include the untamed wilderness but releases control of the mind and heart - logic and emotion - from the confines of church doctrine, mapping them to the contours of the land. By allowing nature to influence these humanizing

[28] This sentiment, that nature influences the mind and heart, was repeated by many during Durand's time. De Witt Clinton, then governor of New York, said similar in a 1816 speech, "This wild, romantic, and awful scenery is calculated to produce a correspondent impression in the imagination-to elevate all the faculties of the mind, and to exalt all the feelings of the heart," (K. J. Avery et al. 1987, 22).

traits, Durand, and Romanticists in general, allow for the sacred to derive from and be influenced by nature. Rather than seeking answers in an institution or by the words of a book (things derived from civilization), Durand recommends one find the answers themselves through personal experience and exposure to nature.

Durand is building on religious symbolism to aid his point. Nature can be appreciated as a source of sacredness and endowed with spiritual vitality through its connection with Christian paradigms of divinity. Durand describes nature as brimming with "holy meaning", second only to Revelation; revelation is a deeply religious concept which entails a disclosure of mystical or spiritual insight, usually sourced from a divinity.[29] In essence, Durand is saying that the insights an artist can gain by learning from nature are second only to those directly communicated by God. Nature is the second holiest teacher, the second holiest source aside from God himself. There are few higher attestations to the sacredness of nature besides placing it in the proximity of the most divine being in Christianity. Furthermore, Durand draws a connection between the work of the landscape painter and the work of God, "the Great Designer of these glorious pictures" suggests that God was an artist, painting these landscapes; therefore, landscape painters are participating and recreating acts of God.

When the Renaissance ushered in scientific thought into the analytical repertoire of the Western world, it created a conflict. The source of truth was no longer singular; God was contested by science, by reason, by the "human". Resolving the relationship between these conflicting sources of truth was difficult for religious communities. Romanticism may represent the ripe fruit of such struggle; the marriage between science and religion could be found by siphoning religious sentiment from God into the empiric container of nature. By blending the two, a balance could be struck which allowed religious devotees to appreciate nature and the material world as expressed by the empirical factuality of nature, while scientifically inclined communities could derive spiritual pleasure from a secular source. The empirical gaze and the spiritual gaze coalesced in a cautious middle ground: nature.

[29] Whether Durand is referring to the concept of revelation or the Book of Revelation, the last book of the New Testament, the theory is the same: nature is second only to the direct word of God.

But what are the effects of immersing yourself in such a unique blend of the sacred and material world? How does the simultaneous spiritual-empirical gaze of nature affect the art of landscapes? According to Durand, “the objects of your study, the intellect and feelings become elevated and purified…your productions will, unawares, be imbued with that indefinable quality recognized as sentiment or expression which distinguishes the true landscape from the mere sensual and *striking* picture,” (Durand 1855b). By drawing from the soul of the natural world, seeking truth from the source rather than through a textbook, art is elevated beyond mere pictures with subjects, resulting in truly revelatory painting, endowed with a fragment of the soul from which it was drawn. The natural influence serves to purify thought and practice; it rectifies artistic corruption imparted by stale tradition and instills effortless artistic truth to painting.

The distinction between a “true landscape” and a “sensual and striking picture” is important. A true landscape, according to Durand, conveys the sacredness which can be found in nature itself. Much like how nature influences the mind and heart, so too a “true landscape” which accurately captures nature influences those experiential centers - which are also related to the highest praise lavished on good artistic pieces; art works which makes you *feel,* and *think* are often acclaimed to be true artistic masterpieces. Durand implies that landscapes which lacked spirit, the sacredness of nature, are merely “sensual and striking pictures”. These spiritually empty images could be compared to, as Emerson might say, the materialist worldview; one which sees factual presence, even marvels at its appearance, but does not engage the soul-searching thirst which the best religious art does. A true landscape painting draws both a scientific and religious wonder, which are conveniently combined in notions such as the sublime, to produce a piece which influences both mind and heart to affect an evocative representation of a sacred space.

Such vividness of rendering and intensity of expression is unfathomable from the artist's studio, according to Durand; the studio might be a parable for the empiric worldview: in it a sacred practice - art - is denuded of its mysticism and emotional affect, left with only the nuts-and-bolts which compose the machine. By overly dissecting, classifying, and standardizing art, it lost its emotional and spiritual value.

Only in the studio of nature, the most sacred of places, in which the rules and lessons of art still mingle and shift with the breeze, can such inspiration infuse the art and artist with the sacred aspect of art.

In his third *Letter on Landscape Painting*, Asher B. Durand elaborates on what differentiates a technically proficient image from an artistically proficient one. He begins with a comparison,

> If a truly fine picture could be produced with the same certainty as an ordinary steam-engine, specific directions might be given with a uniform result; and it would appear that thousands of landscapes *are* produced on precisely similar grounds, with even fewer claims to attributes of Fine Art. Although there are certain principles which constantly guide the hand of a true artist, which can be defined, classified, and clearly understood…the whole history of Art from the beginning, does not present a single instance where a thorough and scientific knowledge of these principles has of itself been able to produce a truly great artist, for the simple reason that such knowledge never can create the feeling, which overrules all principles, and gives the impress of true greatness, (Durand 1855c).

Here he continues to lambast the excessive technicalization of the arts. He references a steam-engine - a particularly relevant reference considering Durand's historical context. The steam-engine, one of the defining inventions of and driving forces behind the industrial revolution, was the epitome of practicality and efficiency and a product of the very essence of industrial civilization; each built to be identical in form and function, with no connection to or derivation from the natural world. In this manner, the steam engine could be said to have represented the antithesis of what Durand, and many who adore the arts, appreciate about art. Art is special in its uniqueness and ability to express. Durand positions true Art in opposition to the prevailing industrial trend of the times; he contrasts expression with technical proficiency, emotion against efficiency, experience over instruction. When the lessons of repetition, systemization, and structure were being expounded in American culture, Durand argued for the advantages of spontaneity and creativity.

Elements of this comparison show themselves throughout his writing. It shows him struggling between the mechanical aspects of art and the intuition which is necessary for a true art masterpiece. He is cautious to suggest a segmented study of nature as one studies the pieces of a steam engine, as artists are trained to do in an artist's studio; a wholehearted endorsement of such a technique would put him in uncomfortable proximity to the institutionalized "critic and connoisseur" who he disavowed not long ago.

Yet he cannot completely separate himself from such practice since it includes essential learning foundations. So instead of straightforward instruction, he encourages close study but intertwines instructions with cautious warnings; technique alone is never enough to make "a truly great artist". In a preamble before embarking on a series of technical guidelines, Durand reinforces, "It has not been my intention in these letters to show you *how* to paint so much as *what* to paint" (1855c). In emphasizing the what over the how, Durand frames the instructions as a guide to approach, not an instruction manual; not step-by-step instructions the result of which is a perfect painting, rather guiding principles as to how to arrive at such a painting.

Durand begins the guide, encouraging a slow introduction and discovery of artistic lessons of nature, "All that I would advise is this - let materials be few and simple at first; as you advance, you will add what your feeling calls for," (1855c). Rather than beginning with all the tools one would ever need to create such a masterpiece, Durand's method is one of discovery. Beginning with the bare minimum, the artist should become familiar with their subject, learning from nature and personal experience what is necessary and what to add. This advice is further evidence of the ideological push against the mechanized culture of nineteenth century America. Towards the middle of the century, machines began to replace workers in American industry, removing the human actor from the manufacturing sector. The institution of machines as productive processes requires that the whole production process be known and strategized before it is even begun; one must know how much material is needed, in what order it must be assembled, and all manner of productive awareness. The artistic method put forth by Durand, by contrast, is very much the opposite. One knows very little entering the production process and discovers as the process of production unfolds.

Additionally, Durand's approach is humble. Many renowned artists of the time came from famous art academies which acted as pipelines for professional careers and institutional support. Durand asserts that this is not necessary. Romanticists believed in the viability of the simple and modest life.

Durand's suggestions here cater to those who may not have the ability or resources to furnish their education as other artists could.[30]

Durand does support some systematized study of nature. At one point he expressly states, "a knowledge of integral parts is essential for the construction of a whole…not to admit that would be absurd," (1855c). However, Durand justifies this statement, comparing the process to learning how to read: first one must learn the letters, then the words, then the sentence, etc. (Durand 1855c). He explains the manner in which one should conduct such a study, "Proceed then, choosing the more simple foreground objects…Paint and repaint until you are *sure* the work *represents* the model - not that it merely resembles it," (1855c). The type of knowledge Durand encourages the student to pick out from nature is the essential; he recommends a thorough study of the elements which compose sacred nature (or any subject matter) to effect a fundamental grasping of being. In this manner, he draws on extra-material understanding of an object, he reaches to the spiritual level, a higher echelon of understanding which entails physicality and meaning, essence. This caveat, Durand argues, distinguishes the type of systematized study he endorses here from that which might be conducted in an artist's studio. Durand crystalizes the point in a later quote from the same letter, "There is the letter and the spirit in the true Scripture of Art, the former being tributary to the latter, but never overruling it. All the technicalities above named are but the language and the rhetoric which expresses and enforces the doctrine," (1855c). He makes it evident that the technical study only serves as an instrument to achieve representational truth or understanding; spontaneity and creativity are key to creating a work which is more than just a copy. The tension between technical proficiency and artistic spontaneity is one which will appear repeatedly in the Chinese text.

This is a slow process, counter to the increasing speed of culture which swirls around it. Durand suggests that even a fraction of such a study might take years, "the study of foreground objects, is worthy whole years of labor; the process will improve your judgment and develop your skill - and perceptions,

[30] It must be noted, however, that many of the Hudson River School artists (and Romantic landscape painters in general) did come from institutional practice. Durand himself was a member of the National Academy of Design.

thought and ingenuity," (1855c). The process of understanding the natural subject is one which requires patience and attention; just one aspect of a landscape painting, such as the foreground, would benefit from years of study. The process Durand describes in his third *Letter on Landscape Painting* is one which requires much training, of both the mind and heart, emphasizes the accumulation of personal experience over instructions.

The proper approach required for such a process is elaborated in his fourth *Letter*. Durand delves into the proper mind frame for appreciating true Art. This is an appreciation which weds the empirical factuality of nature with the spiritual wonder which is inspired by it. But embedded in his critique is an evidential disdain for capitalist influences. He begins with an anecdote,

> 'You had better learn to make shoes,' said the venerable Colonel Trumbull [a veteran artist], one day, to a stripling who was consulting him in reference to his choice of painting as a profession, 'better learn to make shoes or dig potatoes than to become a painter in this county.'...follow any other honest calling to secure a livelihood, than seek the pursuit of Art for the sake of gain, (Durand 1855d).

The harsh truth of the story echoed in Durand's ear: for one seeking financial success, Art is not the best career.[31] This word of warning speaks to a divide in the working world of the United States: the arts are often not financially productive. They do not have the tangible, quantifiable impact which the sciences or technology exhibit and thus are not valued economically. Although this may discourage potential artists, it allows art to operate in a unique space. It permits an appreciation of art removed from economic influence (at least ideally). Thus says Durand, "I would sooner look for figs on thistles than for the higher attributes of Art from one whose ruling motive in its pursuit is money," (1855d). The values bred by financial gain are distinctly different from those cultivated by pure artistic pursuit. Seeking capital from art results in a perversion, some might say, in the intention of an art piece; pursuit of money as the chief operating force which desolates the religion of art. Durand explains, "This is one of the principal causes operating to the degradation of Art, perverting it to the servility of a mere trade; and next to this, is its

[31] This would change for the second generation of Hudson River School artists, some of whom became millionaires (K. J. Avery et al. 1987).

prostitution by means of excess in color, strong effects and skillful manipulation, solely for the sensuous gratification of the eye," (1855d). When art is commodified, it becomes slave to economic forces and motives. In crafting such a link, Durand creates an ideal of art which is separate from capitalist utility. Just as other forms of religious practices are often considered separate or intentionally removed from economic ecosystems, Durand thinks art, or the motivation behind its creation, should be wrested from financial mindedness.

Of course, one must take Durand's words with a grain of salt. Durand himself was a successful artist by any sense of the word. He and the other Hudson River School artists all benefited and themselves were at the mercy of the capitalist system he decries. As with any artist, they worked for commission, for a livelihood. Durand's words are reflective of Romantic ideals: the belief that industrialization and increasing monetization of every aspect of life was corrupting life's meaning and value. He is cautioning potential artists to seek pure motivation; only with the correct attitude one achieves mastery of landscape painting, or any art form, and only afterward can one capitalize on their efforts.

What Durand is proposing, then, is a proper mode of appreciation and production of art. Contrary to the increasingly capitalistic motivations of consumer culture in the United States during the Industrial Revolution, art requires a different frame of mind, one which is separate from the industrial hunger for efficiency and swift progress towards tangible gain (Jaffee 2007).

> To appreciate Art, cultivation is necessary, but its power may be felt without that, and the feeling will educate itself into the desired appreciation, and derive from it a corresponding degree of pleasure, according to the purity or depravity, the high or low character, of the Art that awakens it. And as the true and the beautiful are inseparably connected, and the highest beauty with the highest truth, it follows that the most truthful picture must be the most beautiful, (Durand 1855d).

To approach art and the perception of sacred nature correctly, according to Durand, one must practice observation and patience. When initially confronted with art, the uneducated viewer may struggle to achieve the proper attitude. But art naturally draws in the viewer, whether experienced or not. It captures their interest and educates them as to what is pleasing to them. This process varies from person to person and piece to piece, but the principle remains the same: let the art be the guide. There is no motivation or

knowledge necessary to feel the power of True Art - to Durand, it is a self-catalyzing reaction which is fine tuned to the individual and, if nurtured properly, will develop into a true appreciation. Once again Durand calls on the Romantic principle of personal experience and emotion: an approach to art which comes from subjective experience, based on emotional truths inspired by the art. Durand draws on the language of truth, another topic which once was so divisive between the religions and sciences. What holds the truth often is considered sacred. In the case of landscape painting, truthfulness - that is, true appreciation of the Arts - derives from its faithfulness to nature.

Perception of truth in art can only be achieved by a truthful representation of nature. Although this process seems self-explanatory, to a novice artist it can be overwhelming. Durand elaborates on the disposition of truth in nature, “Every experienced artist knows that it is difficult to see nature truly…we see, yet perceive not, and it becomes necessary to cultivate our perception so as to comprehend the essence of the object,” (1855d). The job of the artist is to translate the Truth of the world into a faithful representation of it on canvas. The process by which the truth of nature be discerned and distilled is not an easy one; but it is a process which is more than practicable if the correct approach is maintained. For this, Durand recommends a slow and steady mindset, focusing on one step of the process at a time, “Learn first to perceive with truthfulness, and then aim to embody your perceptions; take no thought on the question of genius or of future fame…let not the love of money overleap the love of Art,” (Durand 1855d). To achieve good art, the artist must begin at the very start: proper perception. Before attempting to produce, one must recognize and understand; Durand laid the groundwork for this in his previous letter by recommending thorough studies of the base elements which compose nature. Only after the artist has achieved a truthful perception can they begin the process of attempting to translate that into True Art. The result of such a laborious procedure is the most beautiful art; Durand emphasizes, “the most truthful picture must be the most beautiful,” (1855d). The fruits of grasping the truth of nature innately endow themselves on the art; a truthful image of nature would capture its sacredness, “a corresponding soul and depth of expression in the beauty of landscape nature, which dignifies the Art that embodies it, and improves and elevates the mind that loves to contemplate its pictorial image,” (Durand 1855d). By

focusing on translating the truthfulness of nature to the artificial imitation, the result is automatically elevated both in form and in reception by the mind. Because nature contains such complex truths - effects on the mind and heart - capturing it accurately lends immediate credit and effect to the image. Sacredness in nature becomes sacredness in art and therefore sacredness in perception of art - the viewer receives the sacredness of nature through the artist.

In his fifth *Letter on Landscape Painting*, Durand probes the distinction between imitation and representation. He demonstrates the way a landscape painter should study their surroundings and find the balance between empirical accuracy, in the form of imitation, and expressive truth, which manifests in representation. Much of the writing in this *Letter* pertains to purely technical aspects, and in that sense, it is not relevant to this analysis. However, if taken as a whole, this letter effectively demonstrates the principles Durand established in his third letter: he shows how proper study of nature's objects can yield an understanding which translates into more than an empirical faithfulness. Durand uses the example of trees,[32]

> Take a tree, for instance: with its infinity of leafage, you perceive at once that direct imitation is impossible…You are then to *represent* this foliage in every essential characteristic, without defining the forms of individual leaves. To do this some analysis of structure is necessary…If you attempt to portray it by the usual process…you will only have the effect of a solid object. You must do much more than this; the hue of the background on which it is relieved, must be seen through its apertures…When you shall have done all of this, it is only representative, yet it

[32] Durand's usage of trees as an example could be intentional. Aside from being an obvious natural subject, trees were also on the mind of the American public. In the early 1850s, pioneers were just beginning to pan for gold in the Sierra Nevada mountains on the Eastern border of what is now California (Schama 1996, 186). Besides the scant traces of gold found in the soil and riverbeds, a much grander and unbelievable discovery was announced. The massive Redwood trees shocked and amazed the American people. Schama notes, "The phenomenal size of the sequoias proclaimed a manifest destiny that had been primordially planted; something which altogether dwarfed the timetables of conventional European and even classical history. They were, their first observers thought…the oldest living things on earth," (1996, 188). These massive symbols for the immensity of the American spirit swelled the national pride and created a fuss. "it was visitors (or, as they preferred to say, 'pilgrims') from the East who transformed attitudes towards the sequoia groves, making them a place not of curiosity but of veneration," (ibid, 189). These massive trees became more than a tourist fascination, for the American people, particularly those from the East (which, unsurprisingly, suffered from the most urbanization), they became sacred. Nature was reflecting their religious doctrines and nationalistic fervor. "The Big Trees, in short, were sacred: America's own natural temple," Schama finishes (ibid). He quotes Sydney Andrews, a writer in the *Boston Daily Advertiser*, "'I think I shall see nothing else so beautiful till happily I stand within the gates of the Heavenly City,'" (ibid). Once again, nature was placed second only to heaven, the most sacred of places in Christian religion. It is more than conceivable that Durand had the Redwood revelry in the back of his mind as he wrote his Letters on how to properly treat sacred nature in art.

satisfies the eye as fully as an imitation, (Durand 1855e).

To convey the truth of foliage, Durand explains, it would be near impossible, if not needlessly exhaustive, to copy every leaf. Rather, a complete understanding of the essence of the leaves will yield a satisfying image which, although not exact, nevertheless achieves the same effect. These factors shift and the process of understanding changes for each element of nature: water differs from bark which is different from grass and leaves. This is one of the reasons which motivated Durand to caution patience and perception. The detailing of nature is so complex that it takes huge amounts of time to understand its appearance, much less imitate or represent it.

Durand also introduces atmosphere in the this *Letter*. Atmosphere permeates the painting and, although completely invisible, is so overarchingly apparent and strong in its effect that it might as well be opaque. Durand describes atmosphere's importance, "atmosphere is…a veil or medium interposed between the eye and all visible objects…it is that which above all other agencies, carries us into the picture, instead of allowing us to be detained in front of it," (1855e). Thus, it is the imperceivable elements, a veil which shrouds and glorifies, which can be the most important. All of this points to the perspective of a patient and studied approach to painting landscape. Such delicate and intricate material could never be handled so masterfully by inexperienced hands without disaster. By invoking atmosphere, the immediately imperceptible, that which dictates meaning and perception, religion is called into the picture. By identifying atmosphere as the invisible actor which communicates truth and empathy - like a deity does - Durand once more draws on the religious effects of nature as communicated through landscape paintings, reaffirming the existence of the connection between nature and sacred.

By way of example, Durand points out, in his seventh letter, several artists who he sees as having mastered these techniques, true practitioners of this Naturalist theory of landscape painting. He praises Claude Lorrain for his, "truthfulness of representation in his light and atmosphere" (Durand 1855g), and hails J.M.W. Turner, "who gathered from the preciously unexplored sky alone, transcripts of Nature…for the sole reason that he has therein approached near to the representation of the infinity of Nature than all

that have gone before him," (Durand 1855g). He selects these artists to provide examples of correct methods of representing nature in landscape art. Chief among their differentiating factors, according to Durand, is the degree to which they capture the truthfulness of nature. It is this essential element that marks, "the distinction between the mere pleasing picture and that…[which] constitute high Art," (ibid).

The sixth *Letter on Landscape Painting* sees Durand furthering his technical rhetoric, expanding on the ethereal theme established in the previous letter by way of atmosphere, now focusing on light. Durand's intention in devoting a whole letter to the portrayal of light in landscape painting is surely more than artistic. Aside from being a crucial element of any artistic composition, light is a divine symbol; Durand wastes little time expressing his veneration for the sun's most visible gift, "I have more respect for the devout heathen who worships the sun as the visible Divinity, than for the artist whose pictures betray insensibility to the charm of sunlight," (Durand 1855f). In the largely Christian population of the United States at the time of his writing, this is an evocative statement. Durand is likely referencing a stereotyped "other", the pagan heathen (rather than a specific population) to emphasize his reverence for sunlight. Such a statement sheds even more light on the sacredness which nature possessed for Romantics and American landscapists. Bordering on paganism, these thinkers truly felt the divinity of nature almost superseded, or was expressive of, that of God. The manipulation of light, then, was the control of expressive and emotive truth, the keys to the Romantic understanding of truth.[35]

In the seventh *Letter on Landscape Painting* Asher B. Durand presents a theory of color, elaborating on specific colors and their uses, effects, and influences. Towards the end of the letter, Durand enters a defense of Nature as a perfect model. It is here that, despite his eloquent diction, the trappings of Western tradition haunt his descriptions, on which he relies for selective purpose. Durand creates a telling simile,

> It is the province of Art, then, and all the license that the artist can claim or desire, is to choose the time and place where she [nature] displays her chief perfections, whether of ease beauty or majesty, repose or action. Let her sittings be thus controlled, and the artist will have no occasion

[35] The manipulation and portrayal of light would become essential in the works of later landscape artists, as they transitioned into Impressionism. Luminists, a style which later generation Hudson River School artists would adopt, played with light to create calming effects.

> to idealize the portrait, no need to shape her features on his classic model - or eke out an expression that he does not see - no need to modify the light and shade that develop the fullness of her graceful form and matchless color; and every accessory from the vast folding of her cloud-curtain to the embroidered footstool beneath, will be furnished of such cast and fitness, as to require no change at his hands, (Durand 1855g).

Durand compares the appearances and forms of nature to a human model, a tradition in which he is not alone (Sweeney 1989). Not only does his characterization of nature as female suggest the embodiment of nature in a human form, he furthers this comparison by describing nature as one might a model. He gives attention to the "repose or action" of nature, just as a model might take a resting or active pose. He alludes to "her sittings" like one seats a model to be studied and sketched. Even more explicit, he refers to capturing "the portrait" of nature - portrait predominantly a term used to refer to pictures of the human face and form, and one of the most common artistic genres throughout time. He conjures imagery of nature with "the fullness of her graceful form", terms often applied to the female body. Finally, he imagines nature as a female model with "the vast folding of her cloud-curtain to the embroidered footstool beneath." Similar to how an artist seeking to study the human body poses a model on a stool, structuring her body in a way which expresses action or repose, emphasizes curve or contour or decorates with draping gowns which elegantly brush the floor, so too Durand describes nature posing for study.

The way Durand describes the nature model may suggest the elegant statues of Roman goddesses of antiquity or the lavish royal portraits of European monarchs. Evoking such mental images is certainly no accident. Such a comparison coming at the peak of praise of nature as an artistic subject in this *Letter* speaks to the human-imagery which flows readily in the veins of Western Art. Long considered the ideal artistic subject among many Western artists, the human form, especially the nude, carries massive artistic weight. Sweeney elaborates on the significance of the human-nature comparison, "the anthropomorphized natural form suggests a divine presence, it is alive," (1989, 46). Nature, like humans, is alive, a vessel of the divine and all it entails. By using such language and conjuring such imagery, Durand further embeds nature art in the discourse of humanistic art and emphasizes its religious possibilities. Threading the landscape needle through the tapestry of Western art required some allusion and connection with the

dominant model of the tradition, the human form. In this comparative language, Durand attempted to further validate and solidify landscape painting within the Western art historical context.

In the eighth *Letter on Landscape Painting*, Durand returns to theoretical discussion of art, particularly questions around idealism and realism. In this letter he addresses the distinction and application of the idealist and the realist strains of artistic expression. The conceptual divide between idealism and realism is simple. Durand explains, "that picture is ideal whose component parts are representative of the utmost perfection of Nature, whether with respect to beauty or other considerations of fitness in the objects represented…the most perfect arrangement or composition of these parts so as to form an equally perfect whole," (1855h). Idealism, then, gathers the most perfect forms of the elements present in a picture and combines them in a manner which creates the most ideal composition. Durand claims the extreme of such an idealism dictates that there could be no such occurrence of an ideal image naturally in nature (ibid). Realism holds that artistic perversions of the worldly model are unfaithful and should be avoided. Durand says, "Realism…must consist in the acceptance of ordinary or common-place nature," (ibid). Many artistic styles find some placement or range of comfort between the conceptual valley which lies between these two peaks. The challenge posed by this gradient for Naturalist art, which Durand has grounded so fervently in basing in the evidentiality of nature, could potentially strafe against the logic so dear to the movement. Could any landscape be idealized if it is based on such a perfect model as nature? Could the natural image be improved upon?

In fact, this was not such an issue, at least in practice, for many Hudson River School landscapists. Much of their art is idealized, summoning disparate aspects of various natural scenes into a singular image. Asher B. Durand seeks to clarify the relationship between the two and explain away any perceived contradiction. He, like many artists, hails idealism but qualifies the term first. "Idealism does not propose any deviation from the truth, but on the contrary, demands the most rigid adherence to the law of its highest development" (1855h). Instead of taking advantage of the forms of nature, idealism requires their mastery and aspires to capture their most perfect manifestation; the ideal combination of technical skill and spontaneity. The synthesis acquired through the numerous lessons learned by taking

instruction from nature, exposing oneself directly to the elements the landscapist aspires to capture, allows the trained hand to create an image which is more than its parts, yet faithful to its sacred source. Durand defends the ideal, degrading realism, "If strictly confined to this [ordinary and found forms], it [Realism] is, indeed, an inferior grade of Art…the term Realism signifies little else than a disciplinary stage of Idealism," (1855h). Realism, then, is but a step in the process, the destination of which is idealism. So, instead of upholding the factuality of the realist image, one which holds literal truth to the appearance and occurrence of the natural world, Durand proposes that realism is merely a procedural necessity, one which must be accomplished but only in the service and utility of a greater goal.

Furthering this thesis, Durand expands saying, "the application of these perfection to the expression of a particular sentiment in the subject of the picture," (1855h). Not only can an image be idealized to affect a more perfect image of the natural world, these elements can be manipulated so as to effect a certain attitude or emotion. This may not be completely surprising, much of the best art is considered so because of the emotion it evokes. But in a movement so centered on the sacredness of nature, to say that nature can be used to convey human emotions is not an insignificant detail. Here Durand calls on the most human of capacities: imagination,

> the imaginative faculty exercises an influence independent of the perfect ideal of representative truth, but only in extending its meaning to the utmost limit, spiritualizing… the images of inanimate objects, and appealing through them to the inmost susceptibility of the mind and heart, thus becoming the highest attribute of the great Artist in developing the true ideal. Hence its legitimate action is not seen as creating an imaginary world, as some suppose; but in revealing the deep meaning of the real creation around and within us, (Durand 1855h).

It is the infusion of the sacredness of the natural world with the unique human faculty of imagination, then, which combine to create true and meaningful art. As Durand points out, it is the human element of any painting which imbues the painting itself with spirituality, giving life to otherwise inanimate natural objects. The human imaginative capability, after all, is what endows nature and other such religious objects or spaces with their holy attributes; Schama says, "Landscapes are culture before they are nature; constructs of the imagination projected onto wood and water and rock," (1996, 61). Importantly, Durand emphasizes that any such imaginative additions and idealist creations are derived from nature, "all the

elements with which the imagination deals, and on which idealism is based, exist visibly in Nature, and are, therefore, not separate creations of Art," (1855h). Although imagination, human input, is essential to the creation of a work of art, he stresses that imagination stems from nature; in the end nature is the source of all things. Durand finally hits the proverbial Romantic nail on the head. He admits that, in an idealized landscape, what is being conveyed through the landscape is experience, emotion. More than just a pretty image of a relaxing vista, landscape paintings are images through which the artist communicates some experience, conveys some emotion to the viewer. At the heart of landscape painting is a sharing of subjectivity, a bridge between worlds.

In the last in his series of *Letters on Landscape Painting*, Asher B. Durand continues to define the distinction between artistic license and nature perjury. The key qualifiers he provides to allow for artistic license to idealize a landscape tie back to an important principle, "one of its [Art's] modes for attaining a more perfect representation of that which is inimitable in Nature," (Durand 1855i). Artistic creativity, then, has its place and function: the better to convey the truthful representation of Nature which may be otherwise insufficiently expressed via the bland imitative style. Although this is not a new message it punctuates the letters with a note of closure. All the lessons elicited in the previous eight letters should be indulged and mobilized but exclusively in service of conveying the sacred natural image. In the field of landscape painting, according to Durand, the imaginative faculty is praiseworthy in its capability to further enhance the emotive and pictorial impact of a landscape.

Taken as a whole Asher B. Durand's *Letter on Landscape Painting* represents the most cohesive articulation of Hudson River School landscapists' beliefs, practices, and perspectives. Through their study, Hudson River School artists show a particular affection and similarity to Romantic understandings of Nature as a sacred space. Durand crafts a slow and meticulous guide for novice landscape painters as to how to approach understanding, perceiving, and representing their most beloved of subjects. The multitude of technical directives he expounds are perhaps nothing novel - many art movements have similar mechanical aspects and critiques - but they are unique in their employment with nature. When Durand speaks of the Truth found in nature and communicated through the highest forms of art, the

dawning sense pervades that the actual Truth being felt is a sacred one: one which draws out the most enamored and freeing human emotions. The capability of the natural world to produce such emotions in humans, to Durand and the Hudson River School artists, was a cause for memorialization and celebration. The *Letters* attest to the effort of these artists to guide the practices of new believers in the craft. In them, Durand describes a method of approach which reflects his Romantic influences, wherein he stresses deliberate, intimate, personal experience of nature. He shows that nature is the source of truth - moral, religious, artistic, experiential - the greatest teacher (second only to God) one could ask for and a haven for cramped urbanites; nature was sacred because of all the lessons and rectification it could provide the city-dweller, the artist, and the viewer. Durand saw nature as the origin of many of life's greatest truths, if one could venture into nature and immerse oneself in it completely, the effects on their "mind and heart" would be immensely restorative. For the artist, Durand saw nature as the ultimate tutor: all of the truths of form, color, relation, appearance, and emotion could be found within its folds.

Landscape painting, then, is not solely the worship of the natural world. Rather it is a testament to its sacredness which, at its best, is infused with human agency and creativity to yield a work of True Art. The purpose of the landscape was humanity's best attempt at capturing and communicating the sacred truths of nature, displacing them, making them available for those who could not afford or did not want to be in nature. Landscape painting was not something to be taken lightly; to properly convey the important lessons nature held, Durand believed the art of landscape painting had to be completed with the utmost skill and in a particular manner which maximized the effectiveness of that transmission. Nature was sacred and thus by association so was landscape painting.

Chinese Landscape Painting

Setting the Stage

Chinese landscape painting is one of longest and most vibrant painting traditions in the world. Compared to their presence in Western art, landscapes have been a prominent artistic feature in Chinese

art for centuries. The reverence and attention which is given to the genre as demonstrated in the landscape motifs of religious artifacts and writings that remain to us are evidential of a long tradition of respect for nature, demonstrating how nature was thought of as sacred. This history was studied, referenced, and developed by Chinese scholars and painters through the centuries. What follows is a brief and selective reading of Chinese history of landscape painting. Like the history of Western art earlier in this paper, this reading is not definitive, rather it draws on contemporary scholarship and ancient writing to form a narrative reasonably understood and accepted both by many modern and ancient scholars.

A critical difference developed between Chinese and Western traditional approaches to art. The Greeks, one of the foundational cultures of Western art, viewed art as mimesis, preferred representations of nature which tended towards realism and built up an idealistic form of beauty (Stokstad 2008, xxxiii). The Chinese, in comparison, saw the individual signs and symbols which populated art as signifiers of meaning – rather than include explicit symbols (like an image of the Buddha, for instance) the Chinese used the landscape itself to create allegories and metaphors (Yuan, Fong, and Watt 1996, 28). A complex web of symbolism and significance linked Chinese art forms with interpretations and meanings. A defining trait of Chinese art was interpretation (whereas in the West it was often closer to representation). This artistic heritage is evident in Chinese art history from its very early stages - Chinese art developed around the infusion of the art with the artist; their intent and emotion, their perspective, was conveyed in painted forms.

Like English, Chinese has many words for nature which are telling of nature's significance and how it is conceived in Chinese thought. Ziran (自然) meaning "of itself, it is so" is one particularly interesting word. Ziran, nature, is self-creating, independent of any guiding or constructive force. Unlike civilization, nature does not need any input to exist. This concept is especially poignant for Daoist practice: the Dao was the Way of nature, self-sustaining, not forced or controlled. The Chinese word for sky, tian (天), is also noteworthy. Tian can mean heaven, but it can also mean pure or unaffected. Again, the concept of nature as untouched and pristine, sacred, separate from profane society, comes out in the

wording. The words used for nature are indicative of cultural concepts - in this case, that nature is perfect, a closed system, pure and, most importantly, not man made.

To understand the roots of the natural sentiment of the Song dynasty, one must look at the interplay between some of China's most dominant philosophies and how they evolved.

Daoism & Buddhism

The addition of Daoist philosophy to Confucianism, the previously reigning philosophy, among the cultural and ruling elite caused a shift in sacred paradigms. Confucian thought placed the origin of order in the home, in the hierarchical order of the family and the interactions therein; Daoism placed sacred order in nature. The chaotic natural element was the ideal of Daoist order, spontaneity - turning away from hierarchy and order - simplicity and reduction (Shaw 1988, 185). The Daoist sage, the ideal of spirituality and wisdom, lived in the wilderness; in a text written by Daoist philosopher Chuang-tzu, the cave-dwelling mountain hermit is the epitome of a venerable sage (Shaw 1988, 186). Where Confucianism had dealt with human relationships and duties to one another based on human principles, Daoism placed nature at the center of its value system. But Daoism did not act alone; Buddhism played a role in the transformation as well. Wen C. Fong places the centrality of Daoism and Buddhism at the core of the development of Chinese art theory, "The development of art and art theories…owes much to the popularity of mystic beliefs and interest in the world of nature under the influence of Taoism and Buddhism, at a time when scholars and artists, disenchanted with the world of human affairs, sought spiritual enlightenment," (Yuan, Fong, and Watt 1996, 34).

Buddhism was introduced to China during the Han dynasty and likewise contributed to the idea of nature as sacred, although perhaps in a less direct fashion. A number of Buddhist principles encourage the admiration and conceptualization of nature as sacred. First, the doctrine of impermanence; Buddhists believe everything, including the self, is impermanent. Nature is the perfect exemplar of impermanence: the cycle of life, the Dao, which births and decays all things is the ideal demonstration of the

impermanence doctrine in action. Another doctrine is non-duality/dependent arising; nothing is novel or self-creating - everything that exists originated somewhere, is affected by things outside itself, and will affect things around it: nature is a living demonstration of dependent arising. A third doctrine holds that truth is ineffable. Words cannot communicate the existential - ultimate - truths which the Buddha teaches. Rather than attempting to verbally communicate these truths, emphasis is placed on experience - like Romanic values. Nature communicates the truths of the Buddha, a fact suggested by the remote locations of many Buddhist temples.[39] Lastly, a core belief of Buddhism is existence is characterized by suffering (*dukkha*). Such a belief has led many Buddhist schools to distance themselves from worldly pleasures and civil life (the many facets of which are said to contribute to a false sense of satisfaction and distract from the attainment of enlightenment). If one abstains from civil life, as exists in a bustling city for example, in search for transcendence, they are likely to turn to nature, as is evidenced by Daoist beliefs which had quickly permeated Buddhist faith in China.

Furthermore, the imagery of the Buddha, which is integral to Buddhist worship and art became associated with nature as well. According to Miranda Shaw, "The attribution of mist to the Buddha image (in Lu Shan's replica of the Buddhabhadra) assimilates the image to a mountain, ascribing to it the prized mystical quality of a mountain partly concealed by mist," (1988,197). Mystical attributes of the Buddha often took on natural phenomenal forms, such as mist - the association between the image of the Buddha and nature was further strengthened. Just as nature was used to increase the allure and mystical appearance of the image of the Buddha, the religious significance of the Buddha was transposed onto nature itself (Shaw 1988, 198). In sum, various Buddhist doctrines which encourage a transcendent understanding of existence and condemn the attachments of civil life, find a convenient setting and example in the forms of nature (Mather 1958, 76).

[39] Remote Buddhist temples played a significant role in the cultivation of the concept of nature as sacred. Being perceived as sacred spaces themselves, their isolated locales created an association between nature and spirituality. Many of landscape artists throughout Chinese history were involved with monasteries at some point; some stayed for some duration in them, others painted decorations for them.

Furthermore, landscape art was present at the intersection of Daoism and Buddhism. Some of the first practitioners of the painting genre studied at Hui-yuan's[40] Monastery of the Eastern Grove on Lu Shan, founded in 380 CE, which was, at the time, the center of Buddhism in Southern China and would continue to be so for centuries (Shaw, pp.183-184, 194). Hui-yuan's Buddhism was infused with Daoist beliefs. As a result, the doctrine espoused at the monastery combined the naturalistic religious notions of Daoism with the other-worldly, Buddha-oriented worship of Buddhism. Shaw elaborates,

> Through Hui-yuan's teachings, transmission of visualization meditation techniques, and the famous Buddha image, his followers discovered a new, meditative function for sacred images…an image resonates with the spiritual quality or presence of what it represents and even shares a mystical unity with it. Further, they saw such images integrally linked with a landscape setting that itself held a Neo-Taoistic religious significance for them, (Shaw 1988, 99).

Spiritual practice was extended to visualization and representation. This allowed art to be a form of religious practice, the image embodies the spirituality of what it represents. Landscape painting - both a reflection of the mixing of Buddhist and Daoist beliefs in the sacredness of nature and an indication of the artistic models available to them in a remote mountain monastery - became a form of religious practice.

The unique interplay of beliefs between Daoism and Buddhism furthered the association of nature as sacred. Daojia saw nature as an ideal model of self-behavior, modelled on the spontaneous and fluid occurrences of the universal way, the Dao. For daojiao practitioners - religious Daoism - of this era (frequently termed Neo-Daoism, although the beliefs are largely similar), nature itself, specifically mountains, became sacred (Shaw 1988, 187).[41] The association of nature with mystical properties and sacred spaces was bolstered by religious figures - monks, sages and hermits – who resided in and were associated with nature and seclusion. Buddhist practices helped bolster the associations which Daoism propagated, linking nature with spirituality and aspirational and instructional qualities. Not only was nature a source for universal law and moral order, it was also a space for spiritual and intellectual

[40] Hui-yuan (334-416) was an early Buddhist monk who established the first monastery of the Amitabha "Pure Land" Buddhism tradition in China, now the most practiced form of Buddhism in East Asia. He is believed to have been raised on Daoism but converted to Buddhism later in life ("Hui-Yüan | Chinese Buddhist Priest" n.d.).
[41] For further evidence of the sacred aura which Daoist alchemists saw in nature see Ko Hung's (283-343) Pao P'u Tzu, written in the Jin dynasty (1115-1234). A good translation can be found here (Feifel 1941).

enlightenment; its depiction, what would lead to landscape art, became a form of religious practice for Buddhist monks.

Like we saw in Western history, the turn to nature as a sacred space and a moral, intellectual, religious, spiritual, and personal haven was motivated by political turmoil and changing religious landscape. Whereas in America the Industrial Revolution and nationalistic surges spurred on the romanticization of nature, in post-Han China political turmoil, scholarly dissatisfaction with governmental and civil discourse motivated religious adoption of Daoism and Buddhism and the endowment of nature as sacred.[42] Watt summarizes the role of religious beliefs in the rise of the arts, "If Confucianism provided the impetus for social service and political engagement, it was the Taoist love of nature and the Buddhist philosophy of detachment that inspired the cultivation of the arts," (Yuan, Fong, and Watt 1996).

The Birth of Landscape Painting

The turmoil which filled the void between the Han and Tang dynasties, typically known as the Six Dynasties period, saw the rise of landscape painting (Sullivan 2008; Shaw 1988). As art, poetry, and literature flourished, new critical standards were being written which are described in Xie He's *Guhua pinlu* (古畫品錄) or *Ancient painters' classified record* (Sullivan 2008,102). The new aesthetic paradigm, although initially written for the purpose of literary evaluation, expanded to include many forms of creative expression. Xie He's work would become hugely influential because of his summary of the six principles on which to judge art and its creator (ibid). They are, briefly:

1. *Qiyun shengdong* [氣韻生動] 'spirit Harmony-Life's Motion (Arthur Waley); 'animation through spirit consonance' (Alexander Soper)
2. *Gufa yongb*i [骨法用筆]: 'bone-means use brush' (Waley); 'structural method in the use of the brush' (Soper)

[42] I do not mean to imply that these are the only factors which contributed to such developments, such an argument would be impossible to assert. Rather I am claiming that these circumstances were some of the most historically evident factors which contributed to that shift.

3. *Yingwu xiangxing* [應物象形]: ‘fidelity to the object in portraying forms’ (Soper)
4. *Suilei fucai* [隨類賦彩]: ‘conformity to kind in applying colors’ (Soper)
5. *Jingying weizhi* [經營位置]: ‘proper planning in placing [of elements]’ (Soper)
6. *Chuanyi moxie* [傳移模寫]: ‘that by copying, the ancient models should be perpetuated’ (Shio Sakanishi), (ibid).

There is much to unpack from these six principles that will be addressed later in this thesis. One principle to note here is the first: *Qiyun shengdong*. Although precise translations and implications vary, the general concept of this principle is consistent: spirit harmony and life’s motion are two forces which must be well married for art to be truly impactful (what Durand might call “True Art”). This notion puts into words the relationship of Dao and wen. The spirit’s harmony - the wen - which usually implies the artist's touch, the created work, or breath-of-life, must be properly fused with life’s motion - the Dao - which pervades the universe, moving all things to its rhythm. The human creation must always properly and accurately incorporate the Dao to be a truly moving and meaningful work. The idea that human action, human creativity must abide and situate itself within the natural world, not dominate it, provides a convenient, if slightly romanticized, frame through which to understand Chinese landscape painting. The sacred in nature is not only to be found within nature, it is manifested in humans, the work of humanity is not to seek the sacredness of nature in nature but rather the sacredness of nature in ourselves. This search for the sacred in nature in the action of mankind is the pursuit of culture and the artist, who puts their own truth, their own being, in language which aligns with that of nature.

The years following the collapse of the Han dynasty in which we see the rise of Daoism and Buddhism as discrete and popular religions also heralded the birth of landscape painting as a distinct genre of art. The advent of landscape painting is frequently accredited to Gu Kaizhi (b. 354) and Zong Bing (375-443). These two artists were undoubtedly affected by the socio-political turmoil of the time; the Daoist and Buddhist religious influences on Zong Bing, who studied at Hui-Yuan’s monastery, are evident and recorded in his writing: *Hua shanshui xu* (畫山水序) or *Preface to Painting Landscape*, “This response [the eye to a well portrayed landscape] and accord will affect the spirit and, as the spirit

soars, the truth will be attained," (Bush and Shih 2012, 37). *Preface to Painting Landscape*, represents the earliest direct treatment of landscapes in painting (Sullivan 2008, 105). It seems that early intentions in painting landscapes were to capture the spirit of nature, bring remnants of the Dao, which was so enamored by Daoist's, into the home for appreciation. Zong Bing writes,

> The sage possesses Tao and deals with things accordingly, while wise men keep their hearts pure to enjoy material forms. For mountains and rivers have a material form, and yet intrigue the spirit…I treasure memories of Lu-shan and Heng-shan and remember the gorges of King-chow[45]…I regret that I cannot materialize myself and stand over the waters of Shih-men [river]. Therefore I have taken to painting forms, arranging colours and constructing clouds over mountains, (Lin 1967, 31).

For some, landscape painting was access to a spiritual respite they could not afford. Daoist scholars and city-dwellers who could not or did not have the resources available to escape to the mountains could receive some semblance of the natural spirit from their homes.[46] This is a sentiment which would be echoed by Guo Xi several hundred years later. And, although not expressly stated by Durand, a similar affect is intended in the case of Western landscape paintings.

Not only did Zong Bing describe early motivations for landscape painting, he also touched on artistic theory, "How much more should this be true of form represented by form and colour represented by colour, recalling past experiences that pleased our eyes and filled our past days?" (Lin 1967, 32). Zong Bing engaged with technical questions such as faithfulness of the image as well as scaling and composition of landscapes (ibid). The balance of accurate representation of natural phenomenon with interpretive portrayals which incorporated subjectivity and invoked emotion would shape the strokes of Chinese landscapes. What Zong Bing was writing would grow to become one of the largest artistic movements in Chinese history; the fact that such dilemmas were being contemplated almost

[45] All of which are mountain ranges in China.
[46] This can also be read as a bureaucratized propagandization of Daoist naturalism: court officials and rulers wished to further justify their rule by rooting it in the newly anointed sacred imagery of nature. By bringing landscapes into the court, the ruling class may have been attempting to further buttress their own right as rulers by using Daoist imagery and notions of the sacred, the life-motion, which found its expression in the natural forms.

simultaneously as the art form was being born shows the seriousness with which these artists and critics upheld their craft and its subject matter: nature.

> Now those who speak of painting ultimately focus on nothing but appearances and positioning. Still, when the ancients made paintings, it was not in order to plan the boundaries of cities or differentiate the locale of provinces, to make mountains and plateaus or delineate watercourses. What is founded in form is fused with soul, and what activates movement is the mind. If the soul cannot be seen, then that wherein it lodges will not move, (Bush and Shih 2012, 38).

Exact mimeses, according to Wang Wei, was never the sole strength of painting. A painstakingly copied image is not the goal of good painting; rather it is the soul which must be communicated via the art. A symbolic expression of some truth, not particularly rooted in one specific image, is what truly moves a painting. Wang Wei is echoing the first principle which Xie He listed in his *Guhua pinlu*: the spirit-harmony - the wen, the artist's soul, the creation - must be infused and treated with the life's-motion - the Dao. The attitude that landscape painting should evoke more than just the literal scenery and technical talent, was evident early in Chinese landscape art and continued to guide the movement as it evolved – a principle which Romantic artists would assert in landscapes more than a thousand years later.

What began in the turmoil of the Six Dynasties period crystallized and exploded with the stability of the Tang dynasty (618-907). In pre-Tang times, professional artisans and craftsmen were hired to create art for commission, usually some form of glorification of the commissioner's life or with the intention of transmitting a message (Yuan, Fong, and Watt 1996, 34). Scholars, who were now playing a bureaucratic role in the court rather than a consultative or artistic function, redefined the tradition of the arts (Hearn 2008). No longer were artists solely commissioned by rulers or the wealthy for the purpose of boast or propaganda, there now existed a class of bureaucratic scholars who practiced the arts. Instead of using them as a means for lavishing court life and style, these amateur scholar-officials saw the arts as moral cultivation (ibid).

The Tang dynasty eventually fell to compounding external and internal factors. In 960 CE, the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127) consolidated what remained of previous dynastic territory. Although the political and territorial landscape fluctuated, the cultural landscape was flourishing. By the Northern

Song dynasty a new philosophical tradition had taken root: Neo-Confucianism strung together Daoist and Buddhist other-worldly spirituality with Confucian civility and materialism. The tepid political stability of the Northern Song did not encourage hermetic political refuge like the chaos following the fall of the Han and Tang dynasties. Guo Xi says as much in *Lin-ch'uan Kao-chih(chi)*, "The bridles and fetters of the everyday world are what human nature constantly abhors…in a time of peace and plenty, when the intentions of ruler and parents are high-minded, purifying oneself (exile to nature) is of little significance and office-holding is allied to honor," (Bush and Shih 2012, 150).

The Song dynasty saw massive shifts in the Chinese artistic world; landscape painting became a respected and revered movement. Several developments shaped the movement during the Song period. Technical complications, such as realistic representation of natural elements, were mastered. Court politics began to drive the scholar-official away from traditional methods of expression; dissenting literati drifted from the courts, investing in their arts as a mode of expression (Yuan, Fong, and Watt 1996, 34). Art became, along with calligraphy and poetry, a method of emotional and intellectual expression for the Chinese gentleman (Bush and Shih 2012, 89). The product of technical mastery and civil discourse was new methods and meanings in the arts.

The Northern and Southern Song dynasties produced two different, if dialectical, types of landscape painting. The Northern Song was dominated by monumental landscapes.[49] These massive scrolls or screens were painted by court-painters who had absorbed the spirit of recluse painters. These paintings were huge and, like those of the recluse, had multiple meanings. Not only did they use the mythical ethos nature embodied to further the majesty and honor of the court, they also used the natural forms as metaphors and symbols of moral and political order. As Guo Xi explains in *Lofty Message of Mountains and Streams*, the mountains and trees were more than just pretty things to look at (Hay et al. 2005, 383). As the Northern Song fell to the Jin dynasty (1127), the mood changed. Political life was

[49] The earliest founders of the monumental style lived during the Five Dynasties period: Ching Hao, Kuan T'ung, Tung Yuan, and Chu-jan. Their existence only remains to us in the form of attributed works and copies (Yuan, Fong, and Watt 1996, 121).

grim, and artists no longer lavished in grand and expansive views. Southern Song landscape painters adapted the movement to the national mood: in contrast to the monumental images of the Northern Song, Southern Song landscapes were intimate scenes; they suggested mood and emotion over morality and order; increasingly the art was produced by scholar-officials rather than court painters.

A convenient summary of the philosophical theory of the defining product of the Song dynasty landscapists, both Northern and Southern generations of landscape paintings, was articulated by the landscape master Chang Tsao (8th Century). In his *Lidai minguaji* (歷代名畫記) *Records of Famous Paintings in Successive Dynasties*, he stated, "A reaching outward to imitate Creation, And a turning inward to master the mind," (Yuan, Fong, and Watt 1996, 121). In attempting to portray the landscape, and the objective truth found therein, the artist exposed and integrated his inner truth, his subjective expression. For Northern Song landscapists that meant conveying larger moral truths, capturing in fantastic but realistic imagery higher truths; for the Southern Song the outward imitation reflected personal emotions, inner truths.

Again, the first principle Xie He listed in his six principles: *Qiyun shengdong*: 'Spirit Harmony-Life's Motion' - the intertwining of the inner and outer truths - is reiterated. The two combined to create an image which is at once a true representation of nature and a pure expression of the artist. This fusion of artist subjectivity with representational integrity was a symptom of the legacy written here, a new and complete combination of objective reality with moral subjectivity; an articulation of the relationship between Dao and wen, in which the two constituted each other and drew on mutual language to produce imagery which embodied both.

A new pinnacle was created for the Chinese landscape painting during the Song era, a period which many scholars deem the height of Chinese landscape painting (Yuan, Fong, and Watt 1996, 121). Idealism, manipulation of the real into a perfected or idealized image, became popular among landscape artists. The form of this ideal was debated, for Northern Song artists this ideal often was grand and expansive, huge vistas and towering heights; for Southern Song artists it was often confined to intimate

views and emotional set pieces which encouraged contemplation and introspection. Several notable artists rose to prominence: Jing Hao, Li Cheng, and Dong Yuan to name but a few.

It was in this fertile era which Guo Xi (1010-1090) rose to fame and wrote *Linchuan gaozhi* (*The Lofty Message of Forests and Streams*), a movement-defining essay which detailed not only the technical specification of landscape painting, but philosophical and critical theories of landscape art. Guo Xi was a famous court-painter during the Northern Song dynasty from Wenxian in the Henan Province ("Guo Xi Paintings | Chinese Art Galleries | China Online Museum" n.d.). His work was highly regarded, and he served in the highest position of painter-in-attendance under Emperor Shenzong (reigned 1068-1085) in the court's Hanlin Academy of Painting (ibid). Guo Xi was a lifelong Daoist and his philosophy seeped through his art and his writing.

Guo Xi's *The Lofty Message of Forests and Streams* (林泉高致) - *Linchuan gaozhi*

The Song dynasty was a golden age of artistic rhetoric in China. As the landscape painting movement expanded and rose in prominence, critical and theoretical interest was poured into the study of the art form. Many famous and genre defining texts were published during the couple hundred years of the Song dynasty. Chief among these manifestos was Guo Xi's *Linchuan gaozhi* (*The Lofty Message of Forests and Streams*).[50]

What elevates this text above its peers is the sheer scale and scope of its contents. Guo Xi combines mystical reflections, technical instructions, and historical annotation to the effect of a holistic and revealing image of artistic theory during the Northern Song dynasty. Although it was the record of one man's teachings, it has been widely accepted as representative of attitudes at the time (Bush and Shih 2012, 142). The text is composed of five sections which address different subject matter in the field of

[50] For the sake of simplicity, I will refer to *Linchuan gaozhi* (林泉高致) as *The Lofty Message of Forests and Streams* or *The Lofty Message* for the remainder of this essay.

landscape painting. The first section is titled "Instructions on Landscape" (*shanshuixun,* 山水训); this section is the largest of the five and, compositionally, most of the text - the one which will be dissected in this analysis. In it there are eight subsections which deal with discrete parts of his treatise; we will see these shortly. The second section is called "Meaning of Painting"; this chapter has not been translated to English but contains illustrative quotations of poetry with some commentary in which Guo Xi creates a relationship between poetry and painting. The third section is "Secrets of Painting"; this section has been translated and deals with technical aspects of the craft. The fourth section is "Remedying Omissions in the Style of Painting"; this section is not translated but contains references to several paintings. The last section is titled "Painting Titles," and is a mere seven lines long.

Even though the text is attributed to Guo Xi, it was compiled by his son Guo Si (d. after 1123?) shortly after Guo Xi died. As is indicated by Guo Si in the introduction to the text, he recorded his father's words over the course of years of following his brush work and receiving wisdom (Hay et al. 2005, 380). Guo Si's voice is apparent throughout the text but rarely detracts from its flow. The contents of the text are considered to be derived from Guo Xi but the narrative flow, polished delivery, and composition is credited to Guo Si, who noticeably supplemented his father's teachings.[52]

I am working with a translation of the original text. Because of my linguistic limitations (I do not know any Chinese), I am forced to work in translation. The translation was done by John Hay, Victor H. Mair, Susan Bush and Hsio-Yen Shih (2005). To help address the choices and verification of the translation, I worked with my thesis advisor, Professor Eric Reinders. Together we read through the translation and the original to determine the choices made by the translators during the translation process.

What follows is the first of the five sections which compose *The Lofty Message*. I ask questions such as: how did Song dynasty artists conceive of nature? How did these artists express their appreciation

[52] This type of composition was common in China: a master's disciples or descendants would often compile the works, lessons, and quotations and posthumously publish them under the master's name.

of nature, was it considered sacred? Why was nature significant to these artists? How did the artistic practice exert influence in spreading and developing the idea that nature is sacred? By explicating meaning from this text, I hope to show how nature was conceived of as sacred and how landscape painting was a means through which to convey such sacredness. The first section, "Instructions on Landscape", is a multi-faceted instruction manual, philosophical treatise, artistic argument, and cultural artifact. Although it is only one section of the work, it contains the writing most important and relevant for this thesis.

Guo Xi begins the treatise by asking "Of what does a gentleman's love of landscape consist?" (Hay et al. 2005, 380). "Gentleman" (*junzi*) in this context has a uniquely moral quality to it, associated with a Confucian paradigm of moral correctness (Confucius 2016, 6).[53] A "gentleman" is a man of moral rectitude, one who has correct principles, proper etiquette, a polished figure who stands exemplary of the finest culture has to offer. Such a loaded image has thick cultural roots and undoubtedly derives from an idealized notion of what is morally correct – rooted in the dominant cultural ideas at the time, which inevitably stem from ruling class ideology; this class was becoming that of the literati, as opposed to the court-official (Bush and Shih 2012, 192).

What, then, is the basis of Guo Xi's "gentleman"? The Northern Song dynasty saw the rise of the Neo-Confucian philosophy. Watt quotes historian Ying-shih Yü who describes, "early Northern Song Neo-Confucian philosophy as a spiritual movement taking a 'this-worldly' turn," (Yuan, Fong, and Watt 1996, 123). Watt continues, "In contrast to the Buddhist other-worldly view, which posited that the phenomenal world had no permanent reality, Neo-Confucian philosophers developed a metaphysics of heavenly principles (*t'ien-li*), which embraced both transcendent reality and the reality of the mundane," (ibid). This new philosophy combined the spiritual and the material. The Neo-Confucian philosophy was embodied by the scholar-official who absorbed both the recluse scholars of the late Tang - those who had

[53] In contrast with Durand who framed his series of letters as a guide for painters. Guo Xi addresses a specific class of people – "gentlemen" as opposed to Durand's open-ended address to a pupil. Guo Xi's gentleman a scholar-official, both a creator and consumer of art.

fled to Buddhist temples or hermitages and discovered the wonders of nature and Daoism - and the court-professional - those who had remained in the government. Li Chi (late 11th - early 12th century), a Song era critic, describes the ideal Neo-Confucian gentleman,

> Confucius spoke of [being able to] 'follow out what his heart desired without transgressing the right.' [the Daoist] Chuang-tzu spoke of those who are 'wild and reckless indeed, and yet tread in the way of magnanimity.' Here was one who, as a man, was just as unconventional as the latter types, yet, as a painter, had quite as much discipline as the former. Thus, one who knows the subtle principles of the world easily and spontaneously attains a happy mean, (Bush and Shih 2012, 202).

The ideal which Li Chi is describing demonstrates the perfect mixture of Confucian and Daoist statesmanship: one who is spontaneous and effortless yet always manages to maintain his conduct in orderly structure, free in action yet never doing wrong; he is natural and civil. Li Chi describes a poor statesman, "irresponsible and undisciplined, a vagrant contemptuous of society" but as a painter he was meticulous and orderly (ibid). The gentleman was praiseworthy for his channeling of both philosophies. Thus, the scholar-official was the Neo-Confucian "gentleman" whose morals, an amalgam of those which had preceded it, were grounded in a new fusion of the spiritual and the material.

> As Guo Xi answers his previous question, his Daoist upbringing and belief becomes apparent,
>
> The cultivation of his fundamental nature in rural retreats is his frequent occupation. The carefree abandon of mountain streams is his delight. The secluded freedom of fishermen and woodmen is his frequent enjoyment...The bridles and fetters of the everyday world are what human nature constantly abhors. Transcendents and the sages in mist are what human nature constantly longs for and yet is unable to see. It is simply that, in a time of peace and plenty, when the intentions of ruler and parents are high-minded, purifying oneself is of little significance, and office-holdings is allied to honor. Can anyone of humanitarian instinct then tread aloof or retire afar in order to practice a retreat from worldly affairs? (Hay et al. 2005, 381).

Guo Xi describes a man (and it almost certainly is a man[54]) who, as often as possible, visits nature. He not only derives joy from being in nature, but cultivates his own moral compass by absorbing that of nature's. Nature offers him a breath from the suffocating entrapments which plague cities and governance. Guo Xi's gentleman has a strong desire to abscond to the mountainside and indulge in Daoist pursuits of

[54] Huang Hsiu-fu (1006) wrote, "Painting is done by men, and each man has his own nature," (Bush and Shih 2012, 101).

transcendence and harmony with nature. The opacity of the Daoist ideology is hard to miss but the Confucian elements seem to fall by the wayside. Only upon consideration of the person in question does the Confucian ideology become apparent: a man who escapes to nature as a "frequent occupation", he visits often but always returns to civilization, his home. The gentleman is a city (or village) dweller, active in his culture who, as often as possible, ventures out to nature to refresh himself and remind himself of a different form of morality.

The contrast between nature and culture creates a sharp division between worldly and other-worldly concerns: a gentleman can involve himself in the worldly concerns of civil governance and power while simultaneously cultivating a healthy disinterest and disdain for power and civil service. Such a balance can be seen in the above quote in which the Confucian ideology resurfaces to counterbalance the Daoist expressions. When the government works well, when society is not corrupt, the moral order of man intact, then it is an honorable thing to immerse oneself in civil society. "Purifying oneself" - exiling oneself to nature as a form of political protest against corruption or injustice - is not worthy when there is nothing to purify from, no injustice to fight; Guo Xi suggests that hermetic exile was not acceptable when society functioned properly.[56] He cites several examples of famous hermits but qualifies their decisions, "those who had no alternative but to go into reclusion," (Hay et al. 2005, 381). So, the traditional Confucian moral order, based in human systems, was not to be trifled with, only refreshed and balanced with frequent visits to nature, a different but equally important moral order. The combination of the two worlds, natural and civil, was the summation of the Neo-Confucian ideal.

But the devoted, gentlemanly literati who desires for the enlightening paths of nature but cannot withdraw there is presented with a problem: how can he satisfy his natural longings while being tied to his official duties? Enter the landscape painting:

> It is now possible for subtle hands to reproduce them [natural landscapes] in all their rich splendor. Without leaving the mat in your room, you may sit to your heart's content among

[56] A popular form of political protest. Guo Xi mentions by name Xu You, a Han dynasty advisor who refused an offer from the throne by mythical emperor Yao. He also calls on the "Four Old Men" who withdrew from civil society in protest of the Qin dynasty and re-emerged to support the rise of the rightful Han heir (Hay et al. 2005, 387).

> streams and valleys…Could this fail to quicken your interest and thoroughly capture your heart? This is the ultimate meaning behind the honor which the world accords landscape painting, (Hay et al. 2005, 381).

Like Zong Bing before him, Guo Xi believes that the true purpose of a landscape painting is to substitute for the splendor and effect of the real experience of nature. Those who cannot physically travel in nature can achieve a similar effect through contemplation and appreciation of a well-made landscape painting. This might seem contrary to Daoist sentiment - how could contemplation of words or images stand in for the experience of direct exposure to nature? However, Guo Xi references the *Daodejing*, the foundational Daoist text authored by Laozi, in his wording. "Without leaving the mat in your room," is a direct allusion to chapter forty-seven of the *Daodejing* which says, "You need not go outdoors, To know the world," (Laozi 2016, 105). The idea expressed in the *Daodejing* is to the effect of: one does not need to leave their room to pursue knowledge, to know reality. It endorses the idea that one does not need empirical data to know the fundamental character of the Dao, the Way. Although the *Daodejing* was referencing knowing the Dao, Guo Xi applies the idea to nature - which also imparts the Dao. Thus, the purpose of the landscape painting is to cultivate the natural spirit in the gentleman who cannot travel. Sacred nature can be imparted through human creations. A similar belief was expressed by Asher B. Durand when he said, "a corresponding soul and depth of expression in the beauty of landscape nature, which dignifies the Art that embodies it, and improves and elevates the mind that loves to contemplate its pictorial image," (1855d, 98). Landscape painting, then, is part of a long tradition, which includes the imperial parks and paradise gardens, in which people cultivate or recreate nature in controlled environments to experience or capture some semblance of sacredness in their ownership.

Guo Xi briefly mentions recent developments which allowed for such endowment of spirit within the painting. As mentioned before, several technical aspects of the artistic portrayal of nature had recently been fully developed to properly capture nature in its appearance. Elements such as spacing, contrast, and depth had been continuously improved upon as the landscape movement evolved. It was precisely the mastery of such techniques, according to Guo Xi, which allowed for such a painting to have an effect on

the viewer. The technique, Guo Xi held, had to be done according to certain principles and with specific aims in mind, “There is a proper way to paint a landscape,” (Hay et al. 2005, 381). Not only is there a correct method, but incorrect method risks defiling the sacred, “If this aim is not principal and the landscape is approached with a trivial attitude, it is no different from desecrating a divine vista and polluting the clear wind,” (ibid). Nature is so sacred that to misrepresent it amounts to mutilating the sacred space itself. Han Zhuo (1095-1195), a Song dynasty art critic, echoes this sentiment,

> They [the painters] should preserve reality (shih) in their painting. If reality is insufficient, one may as well throw away the brush, since there will be excessive showiness (hua). Reality connotes substance or corporeality. Showiness connotes floweriness or ornamentation. The former originates from nature, while the latter is a man-made thing. Reality is essential, whereas showiness is inessential; nature is the underlying basis, and art its application, (Bush and Shih 2012, 182).

Anything more than “reality” - truth in nature - is human vanity and excess and therefore a perversion of the sacred truth of nature. The sacredness of nature was not something to be trifled with.

Before Guo Xi details the correct painting technique, he first addresses the viewer, the “gentleman”. In order to access the sacredness the painting contains, the viewer must approach it with the right attitude, “There is also a proper way to look at landscapes. Look with a heart in tune with forest and stream, then you will value them highly. Approach them with the eyes of arrogance and extravagance, then you will value them but little,” (Hay et al. 2005, 381). Proper mindset is requisite for proper appreciation. Guo Xi may be invoking Buddhist meditation here. Just as the proper mindset is necessary for insightful and productive meditation, so too proper mentality must precede proper appreciation of painting. To gain the sacred value from a landscape painting, one must already be prepared to receive it; looking at a landscape without being in the proper mindset does not enable such appreciation innately, the landscape itself cannot force the mind into seeing it for more than just a painting.[57] And so a proper orientation is necessary before viewing to glean the sacred value of the landscape.

[57] Guo Xi and Durand agree and disagree on this point. “To appreciate Art, cultivation is necessary, but its power may be felt without that, and the feeling will educate itself into the desired appreciation,” (Durand 1855d). Guo Xi does not discuss how a landscape might affect someone without the proper cultivation (remember it is a “gentleman” - with all the prerequisite attitudes and training - to whom Guo Xi is addressing this text) but both him and Durand

> Further, in order to perceive the sacred one should look at the landscape painting in its entirety, Landscapes are vast things. You should look at them from a distance. Only then will you see on one screen the sweep and atmosphere of mountain and water. Figure paintings of gentlemen and ladies done on a miniature scale, if held in the hand or put on the table, may be taken in at one glance as soon as they are opened. These are the methods of looking at paintings, (Hay et al. 2005, 381). [59]

This is important in the Northern Song because it is the time of monumental landscapes. These landscape paintings were often over five feet along their longest axis, painted on hanging scrolls, walls, or screens, they were often physically large. The monumental landscapes painted on screens and walls presented themselves to the viewer all at once. Guo Xi maintains that to achieve the transportive effect which landscape paintings can have, a symptom of the atmosphere they contain, the whole must be taken in simultaneously.[60] Implied in this approach is an affectation of grandeur; "Landscapes are vast things." Whether this is referring to the natural landscape or the artistic landscape, the effect on the viewer is to be imposed upon, impressed, transported in a manner of speaking. Guo Xi elaborates on this,

> It is generally accepted opinion that in landscape there are those through which you may travel, those in which you may sightsee, those through which you may wander, and those in which you may live. Any paintings attaining these effects are to be considered excellent, but those suitable for traveling and sightseeing are not as successful an achievement as those suitable for wander and living. Why is this? If you survey present-day scenery, in a hundred miles of land to be settled, only about one out of three places will be suitable for wandering or living, yet they will certainly be selected as such. A gentleman's thirst for forest and streams is due precisely to such places of beauty…This is what we mean by not losing the ultimate meaning, (Hay et al. 2005, 381).

He couches humankind's appreciation of the landscape in an active relation to it. When surveying any physical land, Guo Xi holds, it is evaluated by whether it is fit for living, travelling to, sightseeing, or wandering. The distinction between these, briefly: travelling is vacationing or passing through,

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agree that a deeper level of appreciation can only be attained by someone with the right perception and cultivation. Durand argues that the proper training will manifest itself through exposure, Guo Xi does not mention anything in this regard.

[59] The term gentlemen here is different from the moral Gentleman Guo Xi used to begin his treatise. 士女人物 (shinü renwu), has a more inclusive connotation than junzi. It translates closer to "ladies and gentleman" as is demonstrated in the translation above.

[60] This is not always the case. Scrolls (different from hanging scrolls) were a common form of landscape painting and they were usually viewed in sections; scrolled through in pieces and rarely opened to their full length, much less so displayed permanently in their entirety.

sightseeing is targeted recreation, wandering is a mystical meditative activity, living is settling. An important difference separates living and wandering from sightseeing and travelling. Sightseeing and travel are temporary states which are mostly utilitarian in purpose: when one sightsees, they go to observe an exotic or foreign sight, marvel or appreciate it for its unique wonder and leave. Travelling involves purposeful movement through a space. Both forms of interaction with landscape involve certain goal-oriented motivations with temporary engagement. Living and wandering, by comparison, have vastly different orientations. Living and wandering are both essential developmental states for the human being. Where they live is where they ground themselves, what they surround themselves in. Wandering holds a particularly special place in Daoist philosophy, it implies discovery and exploration; the title of the first chapter in the Chuang-Tzu text, one of the foundational texts in Daoism, is "Wandering Boundless and Free" (Zhuangzi 1998); the text repeatedly mentions the importance of wandering as a foundational exploratory state (ibid). Thus, landscape paintings which allow the viewer to live or wander are surely more successful in evoking the sacredness of nature, the moral lessons embedded therein, and the highest appreciation of engagement with nature than those which invoke merely travel or sightseeing.

Guo Xi, in the second subsection, names several "model" artists, saying that if one imitates their work they would surely become proficient in their styles (Hay et al. 2005, 381). But what marks "Great masters and understanding scholars," is their habit of drawing influence from many different schools, comparing and interrogating them to isolate their insights, and using them to create a style of their own (ibid). Durand echoes a similar sentiment, cautioning against the risks of relying on mentors and teachers, "from the habit of seeing with the eyes and following in the track of his master, become in the end what is most degrading in the mind of every true artist, a mere imitator," (Durand 1855a). This advice, learning through study and copying of other masters, is invoking another of the six principles Xie He listed in his book *Guhua pinlu*, the sixth of which is, "*Chuanyi moxie*: 'that by copying, the ancient models should be perpetuated' (Shio Sakanishi)" (Sullivan 2008, 102). One of the fundamental principles on which

paintings were to be judged was how they perpetuated previous work. [62] Thus, a great work of art calls on, copies in some manner, or improves upon a work with recognition to its predecessor. Thus when Guo Xi at once suggests one learn by copying the works of the greats yet does not conform solely to their style rather uses many styles to create an original one, he is drawing on the wisdom of one of the foundational tenets of Chinese aesthetics: one should copy and learn from the greats, giving them proper due and keeping their legacy alive, without becoming a slave to their styles.

In the third subsection of his text, Guo Xi (and Guo Si) elaborate on the captivating essence of a painting. While it is important and insightful information, it mostly deals with technical aspects of painting, not landscape painting, and thus is not relevant for this section of the analysis. However, there is one anecdote worth addressing here. In the second half of the subsection, Guo Si describes his father's work habits: "Each day he put his brush to work, he would sit by a bright window at a clean table. To left and right were lighted incense. He would lay out a fine brush and ink, wash his hands, and clean the ink-slab as though he were receiving a major guest. His spirit at ease and his intention settled, only then did he proceed," (Hay et al. 2005, 382). This excerpt is enough to show the reverence with which Guo Xi approached landscape painting. One fact comes to light here: Guo Xi painted inside.[64] The intention of every aspect of Guo Xi's setting was the cultivation of proper ambiance for painting but this apparently did not involve any natural elements - even scent was artificial. Although the setting may not be the same as the subject matter, the process Guo Si describes in his father's habits is almost reverential in its ritualistic aspects. Guo Xi prepares to paint landscapes as one might receive a guest: he prepares a clean, comfortable, and welcoming space, lights incense, cleanses himself and his space, focuses himself mentally, and only then proceeds with the art. Painting a landscape, to Guo Xi, was a ceremonial process, further indicative of the importance of mindset and attitude towards the art form.

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[62] Another element of this was quite literal. Many artists trained by making copies of original paintings. It is because of this practice that the works of very early artists, such as Wang Wei, remain to us today.

[64] Guo Xi was not alone in this regard, Kao K'o-ming, an eleventh century artist, was described as painting, "On returning home he would remain in a quiet room, shut off from all thoughts and cares, and let his spirit roam beyond material things. When conditions [were right] for creating, he would lower his brush and gradually make far and near areas," (Bush and Shih 2012, 120).

It is worth restating at this point that Guo Xi was a court painter, trained in a certain style. He served as an artist-in-attendance after his completion of the Academy of Calligraphy under emperor Shenzong (1067-1085) (Hay et al. 2005, 380). While in school, and throughout his career as a court painter, Guo Xi painted monumental landscapes on screens, walls, and hanging scrolls. It is possible that the sheer size of these canvases (and their location – walls cannot be moved) did not permit the artist to paint them anywhere but a studio, similar to how the massive size of many of the Hudson River School paintings did not permit them to paint outdoors. So perhaps because of his training and maybe because of the nature of his canvas, Guo Xi did not paint in nature.[65]

But just because Guo Xi and other Chinese landscapists did not paint directly in nature does not mean they did not study it outdoors. In the fourth subsection of *The Lofty Message of Forests and Streams*, Guo Xi describes the way to study to achieve a proper understanding and representation of nature:

> Someone learning to paint bamboos selects one branch as the moonlight reflects its shadow on a plain white wall. This brings out its true form. Is there any difference in learning to paint a landscape? You must go in person to the countryside to discover it. The significant aspects of the landscape will then be apparent. To discover the overall layout of rivers and valleys in a real landscape, you look at them from a distance. To discover their individual characteristics, you look at them from nearby, (Hay et al. 2005, 382).

The principle is basic: just as one would observe the true form of whatever object one chooses to paint, be it a flower, bamboo, or the sky, they must seek it out in its purest and most revealing forms, so too must the landscape painter study the landscape. Like Durand, Guo Xi insists that every landscapist must physically travel and observe the landscape which they desire to portray. Although the advice is nothing novel, it speaks to the precision and faithfulness these artists required of their representations of such sacred material.

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[65] Although the painting itself was not done in nature, there is evidence that sketching was done on the spot. In Ching Hao's *Pi-fa-chi* a novice painter ventures into the forest to draw from nature, "From the next day onwards I brought my brush to this place and sketched the trees. After sketching some ten thousand trees my drawings came to look like real trees," (Munakata and Munakata 1974, 11).

In positing this approach, Guo Xi touches on another of Xie He's six principles. This time it is the third: "*Pingwu xiangxing*: 'fidelity to the object in portraying forms' (Soper)" (Sullivan 2008, 102). In any art form in which something is being imitated or represented on paper, fidelity to the original is necessary; not only for recognition's sake in the most literal sense but also in the moral and extraordinary sense. In the case of landscapes, it is necessary to accurately capture the form of the landscape to convey both the visual similarity and the sacred metaphysics of the subject – one must perceive essential fidelity, not only empirical accuracy.[66]

Guo Xi then elaborates on several representational aspects regarding specific landscape features. He begins with an element essential to Chinese landscapes, clouds and mist,

> Clouds and vapors in a real landscape through the four seasons. They are genial in spring, profuse in summer, sparse in autumn, and sober in winter. If a painting shows the major aspect and does not create overly detailed forms, then the prevailing attitude of clouds and vapors will appear alive. Mists and haze [on mountains] in a real landscape differ through the seasons. Spring mountains are gently seductive and seem to smile. Summer mountains seem moist in their verdant hues. Autumn mountains are bright and clear, arrayed in colorful garments. Winter mountains are withdrawn in melancholy, apparently asleep. If a painting shows the major idea without distracting signs of technique, then the atmospheric conditions will seem correct, (Hay et al. 2005, 383).

Guo Xi makes a few comparisons and descriptors for mists and clouds of the four seasons. Although the attention to detail is evident in his comparisons, it is the subject matter which is interesting. Often portrayed as unpainted or blank canvas, the haze which is affected using mists and clouds is a chief agent of atmosphere - as Guo Xi mentions. The absence of paint in these areas both defines and mystifies the other elements in the composition. Although it is not explicitly stated, mists and clouds also have a religious connotation; the concealing, mystifying effect which clouds and mists create have a host of meanings and implications. A chapter in the *Daodejing* comments on the existential value of Nothingness which echoes in the effect of empty space, mists, on landscapes, "Thus what we gain is Something, yet it

[66] In Ching Hao's *Pi-fa-chi*, the novice painter receives the following wisdom from an sage who resides in a cave, "Lifelikeness means to achieve the form of the object but to leave out its spirit. Reality means that both spirit and substance are strong. Furthermore, if spirit is conveyed only through the outward appearance and not through the image in its totality, the image is dead," (Bush and Shih 2012, 146).

is by virtue of Nothing that this can be put to use," ("Tao Te Ching, English by D. C. Lau, Terebess Asia Online (TAO)" 1963). The chapter describes how a seemingly empty or purposeless object or space can be adapted (by some modification relevant for the cause at hand - "Cut out doors and windows in order to make a room.") to the effect of creating something else. The passage's relevance here is found in its correlation to the function of mists and clouds in their role in landscape paintings. The "Nothing" that they represent helps create a landscape - a reverent and mystic feel in the painting.

As Guo Xi arrives at his description of mountains and trees, the Neo-Confucian mixture of Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist philosophies exposes itself:

> A great mountain is dominating as chief over the assembled hills, thereby ranking in an ordered arrangement the ridges and peaks, forests and valleys as suzerain of varying degrees and distances. The general appearance is of a great lord glorious on his throne and a hundred princes hastening to pay him court, without any effect of arrogance or withdrawal (on either part). A tall pine stands erect as the mark of all other trees, thereby ranking in an ordered arrangement the subsidiary trees and plants as numerous admiring assistants. The general effect is of a noble man dazzling in his prime with all lesser mortals in his service, without insolent or oppressed attitudes (on either part), (Hay et al. 2005, 383).

Guo Xi creates a metaphor using natural imagery - he compares both a dominant mountain and tree to a strong military or civil leader. It is a clear connection between the natural morals imparted from Daoist and Buddhist reflections on nature with the social-oriented moral orders so dear to Confucianism. An order to all nature is created stemming from the most prominent of the landscape features, a mountain for all mountains, a tree for all trees. The relationship of social orders is superimposed on natural elements. It is a fusion of the two sources of sacredness, natural and civil, which marks the Neo-Confucian attitude expressed in Song dynasty artists and here by Guo Xi. The resulting tincture reflects how nature was sacred not only for itself but also for what it represented, what it said about humanity. A chief is compared to a great mountain; an elegant tree is compared to a nobleman; in the process both are validated by the other, nature echoes the human, humanity reflects nature. The perception of nature is enhanced, in Guo Xi's opinion, by the social parable described in the essence of nature. Guo Xi elaborates,

> A tall pine standing erect is the manifestation of a host of trees. Its outward spreading indicates that it brings order to the vines, creepers, grasses, and trees, like the commander of an army bestirring those who rely on him. Its appearance resembles that of a ruler who majestically wins the approval of his age and is served by a host of lesser persons without bullying or intimidating them, (Hay et al. 2005, 383).[67]

The specificity with which Guo Xi describes the comparison is particularly interesting in its reflection of Confucian ideology. Although Guo Xi is talking about art, he comments on politics – the same principle applies to both: a good ruler is a moral ruler and there are certain standards and roles the ruler should embody as a symbol, as part of a system. The comparison of a tall, majestic pine, standing above its host, to a ruler who structures and orders his subordinates without sullying his position by the use of force - stooping to a lower level - echoes Confucian ideals. The ability of the higher power to bring order to the lower constituents without lowering itself by using intimidation or physical means was an essential element of Confucian moral rulership. A good ruler should act as an unyielding guiding star, around which all the lesser elements revolve and order according to the majesty and instruction of the leader. The social order is superimposed on the natural order, one sacred system is linked with another, strengthening the symbolism and meaning of each other in the process.

Guo Xi continues with his discussion of mountains by articulating the specific emotional effects mountains have on people in each season and their importance,

> In spring mountains, mists and clouds stretch out unbroken, and people are full of joy. In summer mountains, fine trees offer profuse shade, and people are full of satisfaction. In autumn mountains, bright and clear leaves flutter and fall, and men are full of melancholy. In winter mountains, dark fogs dim and choke the scene, and men are full of loneliness. To look at a particular painting puts you in the corresponding mood. You seem, in fact, to be in those mountains. This is the mood of a painting beyond its mere scenery, (Hay et al. 2005, 383).

The emotional effect of the actual landscape is communicated and affected through its pictorial representation. Correct capture of the landscape and its emotive capacity, according to Guo Xi, is one of the chief abilities of a good landscape painting (which could fall under the first of Xie He's six principles:

[67] Ching Hao records something very similar in *Pi-fa-chi*, "pine trees are like noblemen; they are the elders among trees," (Bush and Shih 2012, 150).

"*Qiyun shengdong*: 'Spirit Harmony-Life's Motion" (Sullivan 2008,102)). The painter aims to evoke those emotions in the viewer and the viewer seeks those emotions out in the piece they admire. Thus, painting is not merely a replicative art, it conveys emotion, it touches the mind and the heart (see Durand's second letter).

Guo Xi's attention to mountains is almost certainly no coincidence. Mountains played a big role in Chinese belief: mountain worship extended from the very beginning of Chinese religion and society (Munakata 1991, 2). Mountains were first seen as dangerous and mysterious places, where mystical beings and ancient forces dwelled - in fact "In early periods the mountains were not only revered but were considered forbidden spaces where gods and mysterious creatures resided," (ibid). As time passed the mountains slowly became familiar parts of Chinese landscapes and changed into havens for those seeking supernatural powers or spiritual enlightenment - sites of pilgrimage (ibid). Religious Daoists (*daojiao*) associated mountains with the realm of the immortals and sages, and transcendents would often venture into the mountains seeking sources for achieving immortality (see Ching Hao' *Pi-Fa-Chi*) (ibid). Furthermore, remote mountain locales were often the desired placement of Buddhist monasteries: the isolation and removal from urban centers provided those seeking other-worldly attainment with the ideal space in which to practice their meditations and techniques. Thus, a complex web of sacred meanings has been attached to mountains from early on in Chinese thought. Confucian philosophy added to the mystical aura of mountains by drawing moral lessons from them: as Guo Xi eloquently put it, "A great mountain is dominating as chief over the assembled hills," (Hay et al. 2005, 383). Thus, mountains formed a natural metaphor for social hierarchy as well as symbols and sacred realms, mystical beings.

Not only were the mountains metaphors for morality or religious symbols, they were also a refuge for political dissenters. Hermitage as a form of political protest often occurred in the mountains. Many of the disgruntled officials who fled the crumbling Han and Tang dynasties found their way into the mountains, and therein found a new appreciation for Daoism. Su Shi (1037-1101), a Song literati scholar, said of the retired recluse scholar, "When the retired scholar was in the mountains, he was not preoccupied with any single thing, and thus his spirit communed with all things, and his knowledge

encompassed all the arts," (Bush and Shih 2012, 207). The mountains were more than just landscape features, they were teachers and sanctuaries.

Guo Xi continues - the effect of the painting should do more than stimulate emotion, according to him it should inspire frame of mind, a desire,

> You see a white path disappearing into the blue and think of traveling on it. You see the glow of setting sun over level waters and dream of gazing on it. You see hermits and mountain dwellers, and think of lodging with them. You see cliffside openings and streams over rocks, and long to wander there. To look at a particular painting puts you in the corresponding frame of mind, as though you were really on the point of going there. This is the wonderful power of painting beyond its mere mood, (Hay et al. 2005, 383-384).

Guo Xi's words here are remarkably similar to those which Durand uses in his third *Letter*, "That is a fine picture which at once takes possession of you - draws you into it - you traverse it -breathe its atmosphere - feel its sunshine, and you repose in its shade without thinking of its design or execution, effect or color," (1855c). For both of them, the affective power of the landscape painting, capturing nature in its sacred influence, is more than the mood, a way of thinking, a perspective. Guo Xi reiterates one of his primary beliefs of landscape painting: the point of landscape paintings is to transport the viewer into nature, to the scene being portrayed. A good landscape painting causes the viewer to empathize with the scene, imagining himself wandering the white path, feeling the glow of the sun. Nature was a particularly ripe subject for the empathetic powers of painting; because it is such a sacred space, being transported to it would do the viewer a great mental and moral service.

In subsection five Guo Xi describes another approach to understanding a landscape, one which is entirely more empirical. He begins with what looks to be a scientific argument for China's mountainous beauty,

> That mountains in the southeast are often strange and beautiful is not because the universe is especially partial to that area. The land there lies very low, and the floodwaters return through it, scouring out and exposing the subsurface. Thus the soil is thin and the waters are shallow. The mountains abound in strange peaks and precipitous cliffs, seeming to protrude far out beyond the stars. Waterfalls are a thousand feet high, plunging down from out of the clouds. The scarcity of cascades like that on Mount Hua is not due to (mountains) not being a thousand feet high. But, even though there are solid and massive mountains, they mostly rise from the surface of the earth

and not from its center, (Hay et al. 2005, 384).

Guo Xi seemingly disavows a mystical, other-worldly cause for the natural beauty of the Chinese southeast. Contrary to the extra-literal descriptions he has attributed to mountains in the text (emotional and moral characteristics), here he takes a decisively empirical turn. Guo Xi, clearly knowledgeable in geology and ecology, explains the ecological factors which created the wonders he loves. What this study shows is the meticulous observation with which Guo Xi approaches his landscapes. Not only does he study the large forms as they appear - such as he stressed in the last subsection - but he also sought to understand *why* they appear the way they do. A multi-faceted approach to view landscape suggests that, for some Chinese landscapists, to fully appreciate and understand the essence and beauty of nature - all the better to represent it - the artist must seek empirical and phenomenal truths in addition to emotional and moral truths. A similar binary was expressed by Romantic artists in America; a dual understanding of reality, one which embraces empirical observation and spiritual significance appeared in the writings and artworks of the Hudson River School. In both cases, the sacred is not exempt from scrutiny, rather it benefits from holistic understanding. For the artist, it is better to know the relationship between all truths of the landscape to truly perceive its essence and properly convey it through a painting.

Despite his scientific lens, Guo Xi cannot help but use spiritual imagery; mountains which scrape the skies, waterfalls that dive from the heavens. This might suggest that the division between spiritual and material may not be so clear-cut. Phenomenal understanding does not necessarily preclude spiritual attribution. Here again the Neo-Confucian ideology shines through the text. The material was no longer exclusive from the spiritual; a shifting relationship between the two was favorable and did not diminish the value of either mode of comprehension.

Guo Xi continues, giving the same treatment to the Northern Song's northwestern mountains.[68] He follows with a list of famous or exemplary mountains across China. Among those named are Mount Heng, Mount Cheng, Mount Tai, Tiantai, Wuyi, Huo, and Yantang (Hay et al. 2005, 384). What makes

[68] Most likely mountains found in modern Shaanxi and Henan provinces. Guo Xi references Mount Sung in modern Henan province (Hay et al. 2005, 384).

these mountains so special? “These are places where the treasures of heaven and earth are produced, where the caves and cottages of transcendents and sages lie hidden. Strange and towering, godlike in their beauty, their essential wonder cannot be fathomed,” (ibid). The sacred stature of mountains is obvious in Guo Xi's description. Mountains produce treasures (precisely what that means is unclear) of spiritual significance, worthy of the pursuit of such revered individuals as sages and transcendents. Mountains are not mere features of a landscape, they are divine emissaries which gift the Chinese holy wonders. Despite the various methods Guo Xi provides of understanding these giants in his writing, no amount of study can ever lift the veil of divine wonder which shrouds these marvels. The sacred remains unfathomable.

The mention of transcendents and sages is intentional. Transcendents and sages, the pinnacle of the enlightened human, who themselves are covered in mystery and lore, reside in the most sacred of places. Guo Xi began *The Lofty Message of Forests and Streams* by describing the ideal gentleman. But that gentleman yearned for the life of a sage; one engulfed completely in the natural world, living the simple life and moral truth of nature, seeking immortality in communion with the deities of the mountains. The transcendent hermit had no need of Confucian order or societal entrapments; he had found a deeper truth in the sacred lessons of nature. Transcendents and sages, embodiments of Daoist and Buddhist ideals, are tied to nature, to mountains. The connection between nature as sacred is strengthened further by its association with the ideal sacred human state.

Guo Xi closes the subsection by tying this phenomenal exploration of mountains back to landscape painting.

> If you wish to grasp their creation, there is no way more spiritual than love, no way finer than diligence, no way greater than wandering to your satiety or gazing to your fill. If all is ordered in detail in your bosom, your eye will not see the silk and your hand will be unaware of brush and ink, and through the clarity and distinctness, the depth and stillness (of your mind), everything will become your own painting, (Hay et al. 2005, 384).

Combining all the methods Guo Xi had listed thus far in the first section of *The Lofty Message of Forests and Streams*, he arrives at a complete guide as to how to properly study nature’s sacredness; a truly comprehensive approach which encompasses spiritual, empirical, and emotional knowledge. To grasp

nature's sacredness, one must indulge in it; one must be rigorous in their study, leaving no aspect unattended, no stone unturned, all the better to see nature in all its details and understand its workings; one must wander in it, become lost or enveloped in it, in order to properly expose themselves to its sacred truths. Only then can the landscape painting flow naturally from the hand of the artist. Landscape painting, then, is not merely a representation or an emotional think-piece, it is a way of knowing nature's sacredness. At its finest, according to Guo Xi, landscape painting embodies a sacred truth, one which touches on all facets of human knowledge, because it captures the sacredness of nature. Guo Xi believed that through proper appreciation and understanding ("all is ordered in detail in your bosom"), the distinction between reality and painting would fade. When the artist turns to recreate what they learned in their study with brush and ink, they are so familiar, so suffused with sacred spirit, that painting is effortless. The silk and brush fade, the mind only perceives and records nature's beauty. At this level of mastery - both of technique and of subject - all the details disappear; no longer does one need to worry or focus on technique nor on subject matter or composition, the painting comes naturally - everything is internalized.[69] The Neo-Confucian ideal which we have seen appear multiple times resurfaces once again: at the level of mastery, technique and rules become irrelevant, one can be spontaneous and effortless within the rules.

In the sixth subsection of *The Lofty Message of Forests and Streams* Guo Xi takes aim at some faults he sees plaguing landscape painters of his day. The criticisms he levels at them range from technical flaws to conceptual mistakes. Several statements are made, each addressed in turn. Guo Xi

[69] A similar sentiment is described in a story from Chuang-tzu's Daoist text Chuang-tzu: a butcher is carving an ox for a lord. The butcher cuts with such practice and precision the meat practically falls off the ox's carcas with no effort. The lord is so impressed he marvels at the butcher's talents. The butcher responds, "What your servant loves is the Way [the Dao], which goes beyond mere skill. When I first began to cut oxen, what I saw was nothing but whole oxen. After three years, I no longer saw whole oxen. Today, I meet the ox with my spirit rather than looking at it with my eyes. My sense organs stop functioning and my spirit moves as it please," (Zhuangzi 1998, 35). The butcher attains such mastery and familiarity with his trade, he no longer thinks of technique or practice, he knows oxen on an extra-physical level. This Daoist precept is echoed by Guo Xi.

begins with "expansive fullness"; he claims that the thematic portrayal artists convey in their paintings, such as "the pleasure of wise or benevolent men", are insufficiently handled (Hay et al. 2005, 384).[70]

He moves on to "examining to the point of thorough familiarity", a habit which he emphasized repeatedly throughout the text. He admonishes artists for,

> When painting mountains [they] depict no more than four or five peaks. When painting water they depict no more than four or five waves…In painting mountains, high and low, large and small, all should be appropriately harmonious or full to front and rear; their heads (summits) should bow in due order and their limbs respond in perfect unison,
> (Hay et al. 2005, 385).

Although his attacks seem vague, the principle is clear. These untempered artists are composing landscapes which are too rigid, too constructed. It seems that in attempting realistic portrayals, they overly formalize their paintings at the cost of faithfulness to nature. Guo Xi points out that the key to painting landscapes is attending to the actual forms of nature. Rarely is nature so structured as to have five peaks or five waves consecutively; thorough familiarity with nature would immediately expose these forms as false. These artists have not spent enough time studying nature, according to Guo Xi, and as a result their paintings lack true fidelity to nature – they are desecrating the sacredness of nature.

His last point of contention is "discovering the quintessential". He explains, "A thousand-tricent stretch of mountains cannot be uniformly wondrous. A ten-thousand-tricent course of water cannot be uniformly attractive…If one were to paint everything in the whole sweep, how would that be different from a map?" (Hay et al. 2005, 385). Guo Xi touches on an important distinction: a map (usually) intends no emotional evocation, no spiritual stimulation, no visual pleasure; landscape paintings capture the landscape in its most wondrous forms, inspiring and moving. To include an entire mountain range, even the dullest parts, in a landscape painting would sully the image, defeat the purpose, detract from the

[70] He gives thematic examples of "A Benevolent Man Takes Pleasure in the Mountains" and "A Wise Man Takes Pleasure in the Water", both classical Confucian themes which appear in *Analects,* 6.23. Guo Xi criticizes the unnamed artist as improperly representing the emotive impact of the themes. He cites a well-known illustration of poet Lu Hung's composition *Thatched Lodge* as demonstrative of proper handling of the first theme and a painting by Wang Wei (he did a series of such paintings) as the correct handling of the second. Of course, the subject of the themes themselves is noteworthy: benevolent men with mountains and wise men with water. A further demonstration of the praiseworthiness of human infatuation with nature. Without the referent paintings, however, it is impossible to say exactly why the unnamed artist failed in his attempts at these themes.

sacred atmosphere. Landscapes are not literal copies of the scene they represent, rather they use the most sumptuous elements of the view to create a representation which captures the scenes spirit. Guo Xi supports the idealist opinion that parsing a landscape is commendable if the product strikes true to the spirit of the scene, which is often more than the sum of its parts.

Guo Xi sums up his criticism in a series of exemplary statements which demonstrate how various technical faults can cause unsavory paintings. Most follow in the form of "Concentrating on secluded retreats leads to insignificance. Concentrating on figures leads to vulgarity," and so on (Hay et al. 2005, 385). Towards the end of the section, he enumerates what makes the landscape breathe, "Water that does not flow is said to be dead water; clouds that are not natural, to be frozen clouds" (ibid). Beyond the literal implications of unskillful portrayal, these statements further speak to the life imbued in landscape paintings. These paintings breath and move, change as the nature they are based on does. To achieve the transportive effect, which Guo Xi holds is one of the primary functions of the landscape painting, the painting itself must live, reproducing the nature it portrays.

Guo Xi elaborates on the parallel between man and nature. He focuses on mountains and water, as he has consistently. The way in which he describes the multitude of aspects of a mountain amount to personality traits:

> A mountain has the significance of a major object. Its form may rear up, may be arrogantly aloof…It may be heroic and martial, may be sacred or awe-inspiring. It may glare down or hold court to its environment. It may be capped with further peaks or ride upon lesser slopes. It may have others which lean upon it in front or depend upon it in the rear. It may seem to gaze down from its eminence and survey the ground below. It may seem to wander down to direct its surroundings, (Hay et al. 2005 , 385).

Guo Xi speaks of the mountains as he might a person. He characterizes them, draws out their soul and emotion; he defines relationships and hierarchies. Not only does such vivid description demonstrate how well Guo Xi has studied his landscapes, it also sheds light on the reverential attitude in which his approach is framed. The sacred has many faces and appears in many forms, the mountains are an embodiment of this. They are not only awe-inspiring, but instructive in their forms. Guo Xi extracts from these mountains' moral codes: just as a mountain may visibly support another or have hidden dependents,

so too can a human support those around them or be helped by others; as a mountain can command its surroundings, be cruel or kind, so too can a human rule in varying manners. In the style of a Neo-Confucian scholar, Guo Xi reads into the natural forms moral and spiritual lessons. The landscape is a teacher not only a model. Guo Xi gives water a similar treatment in the next paragraph:

> Water has the significance of a living object.[71] Its form may be deep and peaceful, may be lithe and slippery…It may be fat and oily, may spray out in a screen or shoot out like an arrow…It may fall piercing the heavens or may splash and crash into the earth…It may embrace mists and clouds, elegant and enticing…Such are the living formations of water, (Hay et al. 2005, 385).

Water is alive. Where mountains have presence and imposition, water moves and changes. Water has almost universal sacred significance but is of particular significance to Daoism; in chapter eight of the *Daodejing* water is said to embody "highest good" (Laozi 2016). Aside from being a source of life (or perhaps because of that), water has conceptual and symbolic beauty. Guo Xi picks up on the effortless symbolism water evokes; he suggests an image of a being who can be fickle or generous, beautiful, and dangerous, sacred and mundane. Much like his treatment of mountains, Guo Xi articulates the living spirit that water has which shows his philosophical foundations: the combination of natural and civil character is typical of Neo-Confucianism.

But the clearest parallel comes in the next paragraph where Guo Xi combines mountains and water,

> A mountain has water as blood, foliage as hair, haze and clouds as its spirit and character. Thus, a mountain gains life through water, its adornment through vegetation, and its elegant charm through haze and clouds. Water has the mountain as its face, huts and pavilions as eyes and eyebrows, anglers as its soul. Thus, water gains its charm through the mountain, its vivacity through huts and pavilions, its ranging freedom through the anglers. Such is the interaction of mountain and water…Rocks are nature's bones and, with bones, value is placed on their being strong and well covered, not poking through the surface. Water is nature's blood and, with blood, value is placed on its circulating and not congealing, (Hay et al. 2005, 386).

[71] The Chinese word used here 水，活物也 (shui, huowuye) also translates to 'water is a living thing' or living creature, living being. 'has the significance of' is an interpretation choice made by the translators. This alternative interpretation is all the more revealing for the directness of the anthropomorphication of water.

In a beautiful metaphor, Guo Xi describes the relationship between mountains and water, the resulting interplay animates both. Indeed, this nature is not so dissimilar from humans. Mountains have blood, hair, spirit, and character; water has a face with eyes and a soul; rocks are the fundamental structure of it all, the bones. The comparison he has been building throughout the text finally articulates itself. Nature is the same as a person: it has the same organs, the same characteristics, the same emotions. What moves a human moves nature as well; what a human expresses nature expresses as well. Nature is sacred because it is so like the person, it shows us a reflection of ourselves. Chang Tsai, a Song dynasty scholar, comments, "as (the sage) views the world, there is in it no element that is not (a reflection of) his own self," (Yuan, Fong, and Watt 1996, 125). Nature provides a model for the individual: what makes them charming, what defines their soul, what should be hidden and how. Guo Xi expresses a profoundly Daoist principle: the Dao is everything, it shapes humanity and nature, it guides both our developments and creations. He beautifully summarizes the sacredness in nature. The parallel works simultaneously as a reading of literal landscapes or as a guide for painting them. The union of both humanity and nature in the Dao is manifested in his words.

The Neo-Confucian ideology is palpable. Guo Xi seamlessly combines the language of traditional Confucianism, which focuses on the human creature in all its lessons and morals, with the forms of Daoism and Buddhism, which models itself after nature. The progeny of these two seemingly opposite philosophical traditions is embodied in this text and the monumental landscapes to which it corresponds.

The final subsection of the first part of Guo Xi's *The Lofty Message of Forests and Streams* is mostly technical instruction for composition, perspective, and proportion.

By reading into the first section of Guo Xi's *The Lofty Message of Forests and Streams*, we have peered into the perspectives of Chinese Song dynasty landscape painters. Guo Xi has revealed how nature, in an ideology deeply rooted in Daoism, influenced by Buddhism, and balanced with Confucianism, was a moral guide. The wilderness was a place with many sacred associations even before the Song dynasty. The combination of Confucian ideals with Daoist philosophy caused Neo-Confucian scholar-officials and painters, like Guo Xi, to see parallels and lessons in nature which instructed them on

their civil lives. Nature was sacred because it reflected humanity, an idealized version of how humans could act and think. Landscape paintings were a crucial attachment to this nature for officials who could not visit nature frequently; the paintings served as shrines, embodiments, and reminders of the natural world with all its lessons and sacred significance. Like any religion, the artists and appreciators ("gentlemen") of landscape painting (and nature) had a certain set of practices and beliefs which had to be maintained to properly receive and perceive the sacredness in nature. For Guo Xi, elaborate rules had to be observed, specific guidelines for the study and creation of the artwork; direct study of nature, proper balance between technique and spontaneity, and the correct equilibrium and placement of elements within the painting had to be followed. These guidelines served to structure and reminded the practitioners and patrons of the landscape arts that nature was a holy source, one which had to be treated appropriately and with respect. These landscape paintings were a connection to another world where things existed as they ought to, a place where civil servants could learn about the world and about themselves.

Ideology to Art

Thus far we have seen how these two cultures came to view nature as sacred. Asher B. Durand and Guo Xi wrote eloquently and at length about the system of beliefs and practices with which they upheld nature. Nature was a moral and spiritual guide, a refreshing open and un-made place where people sick of crowded and corrupt urban life could enlighten themselves with divine inspiration. Appreciation and contemplation of landscape becomes a conduit for moral or spiritual cultivation, a breath of fresh air to combat the suffocating smog of civil society.

But how does all this rhetoric translate into the actual image? Do the concepts and ideas which Durand and the Romanticists and Guo Xi and the Song dynasty literati preach show themselves in the art they produced and so admired? A close look at some paintings might help expose the relationship these artists, and their ideology, had with the art of their time. By bringing selected examples of the arts from each tradition, I hope to bring to light comparisons and contrasts in both rhetoric and practice between the two.

To begin, consider two paintings, one from each tradition. In the case of the Hudson River School a good place to start might be at the beginning of the movement. Thomas Doughty's (1793-1896) *In Nature's Wonderland* (1835) provides an archetypal American landscape painting. Doughty introduced philosophical, contemplative, nearly religious treatment of nature in his paintings, Durand's "true landscape".[72] It happens to be a perfect articulation of the Romantic encounter with nature: a solitary figure, perhaps a hunter or a wanderer, standing on the shore of a pond or river, facing a cliff with mountains barely visible in the far distance, faded in the blinding aura of the sun, casting light and shadow alike.

For the Song dynasty landscapists, take one of the Northern Song dynasty's greatest masterpieces, Fan Kuan's *Travelers among Mountains and Streams* (n.d.).[73] When discussing Northern Song landscapes, it is near-impossible to avoid the immense status of Fan Kuan. Fan Kuan (范寬, 950–1032) was a painter during the Northern Song; although little is known about his personal life, he was a Daoist ("Fan Kuan – China Online Museum" n.d.).[74] His painting, *Travelers among Mountains and Streams*, is legendary and is considered one of the finest Chinese landscape paintings of all time.[75] The towering mountains and small travelers are emblematic of Northern Song monumental landscapes.

[72] Thomas Doughty was one of the first of the Hudson River School who painted in nature. Robert Gilmore, an early patron of Doughty's wrote in 1821, "I have bought several of his pictures, especially his studies from Nature on the spot, which are his best performances," (Sweet 1945, 36).

[73] The painting has garnered recent interest because of a recent discovery of the artist's own signature hidden among the details (to the right of the donkeys, hidden in the leaves), uncovered in 1958 (Sullivan 2008, 180) making *Travelers among Mountains and Streams* one of the only remaining originals from the Song period landscapes.

[74] Fan Kuan is a name given to him after he became famous. His original name was Fan Chung-cheng. Liu Tao-shun, an 11th century writer noted that Fan Kuan received that name (which means "the Expansive") because of his "liberal and broadminded" temperament (Bush and Shih 2012, 116-117).

[75] Both by Fan Kuan's contemporaries and by modern scholars. Liu Tao-shun, quoted before, Kuo Jo-hsu (1080), Mi Fu (1052-1107) all considered him one of the greatest landscape painters of all time. Modern scholars such as Michael Sullivan, Susan Bush and Fong Watt all praise Fan Kuan's works as well.

Figure 1.0. Thomas Doughty, *In Nature's Wonderland*, 1835, oil on canvas. Detroit Institute of Arts, Founders Society Purchase, Gibbs-Williams Fund, 35.119.

Figure 1.1. Fan Kuan, *Travelers among Mountains and Streams*, n.d., ink and light color on silk, 81.2 x 40.7 in. (206.3 x 103.3 cm). National Palace Museum, Taipei.

These two images show how alike yet how different the same craft and similar ideologies can be. In both paintings, a sense of emotional connection or reaction immediately jumps out to the viewer. In *In Nature's Wonderland,* despite there being no words, action, or emotive human expressions in the image - barely any human presence at all - feeling seeps through the canvas. There are several distinct features to *In Nature's Wonderland* which are particularly characteristic of the Romantic ideal of nature which the Hudson River School channeled in their work. The first such theme is the solitary figure: the only figure seen in the painting is an individual, dwarfed by the boundless nature around them.[76] We do not see their

[76] One might be reminded of Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1818). His *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* has become synonymous with the Romantic movement. It similarly frames a faceless individual confronted by the vastness of nature, albeit in a different emotional tone than Doughty's individual in *In Nature's Wonderland*.

face, nor do we know much about them, merely that they have arrived at a stunning vista. Finding oneself in nature was a solitary venture for Romanticists; nature was an escape from the throngs of the city, a time to be with oneself in the expanses of the American wilderness.[77] A similar trend appears in Chinese ideal of hermitude. The lone sage or mystic, who, in Daoist tradition, are considered the most admirable and knowledgeable of people, was the model for the Song dynasty scholar-official who wished to engage with nature. To properly experience the lessons and effects of nature, one had to go alone, leaving behind them acquaintances, work, and connections to civil life. The individual in Doughty's painting does not recoil or embrace the scenery before them, rather they seem transfixed, lost in contemplation, nature inspiring their thoughts, what Durand referred to as nature's "influence on the mind and heart" (Durand 1855b).

Since the Romantics saw experience as the basis of truth, personal experience became the individual's gospel, one which had to be conveyed to another who had different experience. Emotion plays a large part in Romantic interpretation of truth: objects and experience are tinged by emotion, can be conduits for sentimental truths. This idea is expressed by Chang Tsai, "By expanding one's mind, one is able to embody the things of the whole world…as (the sage) views the world, there is in it no element that is not (a reflection of) his own self," (Yuan, Fong, and Watt 1996), 125). The natural world was at once a reflection of humanity and the individual. It was understood that emotion was an essential part of a person's experience, truth was always reflective of the individual. Doughty and Fan Kuan are drawing on this idea; using the language of nature, they are attempting to extract an emotional truth, one Durand might call the Truth of Art, "For I maintain that all Art is unworthy and vicious which is at variance with Truth…which impresses us with the same feelings and emotions that we experience in the presence of the Reality," (Durand 1855a).

To convey such a truth Doughty and Fan Kuan employ several artistic techniques which combine to evoke Durand's "Truth of Art". What Doughty depicts in *In Nature's Wonderland* and Fan Kuan in

[77] Such an ideal is demonstrated in Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*: he lived alone for over two years at Walden pond in Massachusetts. During his time there he wrote *Walden* which includes ruminations on every aspect of life. In it he derides thoughtless urban life and mechanistic work habits, praises the clarity of thought and splendor the natural world provides.

Travelers among Mountains and Streams are almost undoubtedly idealized pictures. Whether such landscapes existed or appeared in just the way they are captured is questionable, but such concerns escape the point of the paintings. Durand explained, "its [idealism] legitimate action is…in revealing the deep meaning of the real creation around and within us," (Durand 1855h), and what Guo Xi hailed as "discovering the quintessential…if one were to paint everything in the whole sweep, how would that be different from a map?" (Hay et al. 2005, 385). Doughty is not fabricating some perfected wonderland, as the title might suggest, rather he is distilling the quintessential image and meaning of nature, using the forms and imagery of the natural world to communicate a personal message, more subtle truths: emotional truths, moral truths, sacred truths; so too, Fan Kuan is creating a message in visual form by using natural symbolism and imagery.

The artists impart these truths via these idealized landscapes using some specific techniques. In *In Nature's Wonderland* the painting has a soft appearance, the delicate light glints off the leaves and brightens the sky. Detailing is intricate but not suffocating, a calm haze seems to envelope the image: the unspecific yet permeating presence in the painting Durand referred to as the painting's atmosphere, "that which above all other agencies, carries us into the picture, instead of allowing us to be detained in front of it," (1855e). The precise details which might attribute to the causation of such an effect are hard to pin down, and that is the point, it is almost ineffable. In the effect it creates here, nature is not harsh, it does not threaten, there is no imposition; for Doughty, nature is a wonderland, the viewer sinks into its warm embrace. This notion of nature as a paradise is a truth which Doughty conveys in his landscape and his words, "The calm shade, Shall bring a kindred calm, and the sweet breeze, That makes the green leaves dance, shall waft a balm, To my sick heart," (Sweet 1945, 35).

Part of the affectation of atmosphere for Hudson River School artists was the imperceptibility of creation of the work, the artist's hand should not show on the canvas. In order to fully affect the sensation of transportation a good landscape painting can have, evidence of the artist's brush work only detracted from the overall effect. Durand says just this in his seventh letter, "The less apparent the means and manner of the artists, the more directly will his work appeal to the understanding and the feelings,"

(1855g). In this sense the Hudson River School artists depart from Song dynasty artists. For Americans, the artist's experience should be conveyed through manipulation of the forms and images, not the manner of portraying them.[79]

Fan Kuan's piece shows how Chinese artists engaged with a similar technique, albeit to different effects: the vivid contrast of detailed imagery of mountains and trees and intangibility and obscurity of mist create a feeling of soothing yet imposing nature. Like many Northern Song artists, Fan Kuan painted his nature in lucid and masterful detail; fine lines and smooth washes evoke the mountains and trees he wishes to depict. But rarely was the entire painting rendered in realistic ink strokes. Between the foreground and surrounding the mountains is a thick layer of mist or fog - represented by leaving the canvas blank (or relatively so). Mist plays an important part in Chinese landscapes even beyond those of the Northern Song.[80] Unlike most Western paintings during the nineteenth century, which preferred to occupy the whole canvas with detail and paint, the mystifying, obscuring effect of mist was of great importance for the sacred ambience of a painting, and contributed immensely to the atmosphere (Hay et al. 2005, 383). Li Cheng Sou, a twelfth century artist, wrote, "through mists, clouds, vapors, and fogs. One can say that in emptiness there is substance," (Bush and Shih 2012, 162). The delicate balance of detailed mountains and forest scenery with the vagueness of mists and clouds is a common tension in Chinese landscapes. The mixture of the two speaks to the dual perception of nature and what makes it so sacred: it is at once direct, evident, empirical, and concrete both in form and in function, but it is also mysterious, hidden, spiritual, and changing. (Doughty may be hinting at this interplay in his painting by covering the foreground in shadow - in the unseen.)

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[79] This would change in the art movements which immediately followed (and were in part inspired by) the landscape movement. Impressionism flipped the script and found meaning in the artist's painting style as well as the image they created.

[80] The portrayal of nature infused with mist correlates to Daoist and Buddhist beliefs in more than a literal sense, it reflects linguistic patterns as well. "xuan" (玄), a word meaning black, dark, profound, mysterious, is commonly used in Buddhism and Daoism. Similarly, "mijiao" (密教), which translates to dense, dark, secret teachings, is used in esoteric Buddhist rhetoric. The connection between spirituality, sacred meaning, is deeply tied to the concept of mystery and imperceptibility. Mists are thus a visual representation of the conception of sacredness or spiritual truth being hidden. The resulting imagery is instructive and mystical.

Both artists articulate the concept that nature is mentally, morally, and physically a beneficial place for people. In *In Nature's Wonderland,* Doughty communicates his experience of nature as a wonderland through his treatment of wilderness which surrounds the individual. Not only does it engulf them, dwarf them, it does not threaten or intimidate. For the Romanticists, untamed nature was not something to be feared or controlled rather it was a welcoming and restorative place, a sentiment which Thomas Cole avidly believed, "in gazing on the pure creations of the Almighty, he feels a calm religious tone steal through is mind, and when he has turned to mingle with his fellow men, the chords which have been struck in that sweet communion cease not to vibrate," (1980, 4). What Doughty may be hinting at in *In Nature's Wonderland* is the Romantic theory which holds nature as a source of moral and spiritual order, a teacher for a better life. Durand explained, "The external appearance of this dwelling-place, apart from its wondrous structure and functions that minister to our well-being, is fraught with lessons of high and holy meaning," (1855b). The landscape was a sacred teacher; an individual went there or studied it to learn higher existential truths. For Romantics, the lessons learned in nature generally pertained to the individual: validation of self, personal empowerment, emotional clarity. Wilderness, as is shown in Doughty's painting, is not violent or viscous, it is calm, lush, and welcoming. Part of this instructiveness was imparted on the viewer of a landscape, "There is…a corresponding soul and depth of expression in the beauty of landscape nature, which dignifies the Art that embodies it, and improves and elevates the mind that loves to contemplate its pictorial image," (1855d). It was important for city-dwellers to get their fill of natural remedies, if not in person, at least through paintings.

The people of the Song dynasty saw similar importance in nature. However, the moral insights which nature imparted were somewhat different. Fan Kuan's *Travelers among Mountains and Streams* is a prime example of the type of morality Song dynasty literati saw in nature. The prominence of the mountain in his work is no coincidence. The monumental landscapes of the Song dynasty were dominated by mountains - the most naturally occurring monumental structures. In the fourth part of the first section of *The Lofty Message of Forests and Streams* Guo Xi states,

> A great mountain is dominating as chief over the assembled hills, thereby ranking in an ordered arrangement the ridges and peaks, forests and valleys as suzerain of varying degrees and distances. The general appearance is of a great lord glorious on his throne and a hundred princes hastening to pay him court, without any effect of arrogance or withdrawal (on either part), (Hay et al. 2005, 383).

The mountain was more than just a landscape feature for Neo-Confucian Northern Song artists: it had moral and spiritual significance. The mountains become a symbol of rulership and hierarchy, an ideal of order: in looking up at the towering mountain, we are reminded of our place in the universe, that there are beings greater than us and systems larger than ours. Guo Xi solidifies the relationship between man and nature shortly afterwards, "a mountain appears larger than a tree and a tree larger than a man," (Hay et al. 2005, 386). There is an ideal order to which man belongs, where mountains are the pique. One order reflected the other. Thus, Fan Kuan's towering mountains are more than just scenery, they are emblematic of a belief system; the lessons scholar-official read in nature reflected their roles as governing officials: proper order, correct use of power, and the importance of structure. Fan Kuan's *Travelers among Mountains and Streams* vividly illustrates the importance of mountains in Northern Song art by placing the mountain in the center of the image, dominating the physical and conceptual space. [82] It was important that the ruling officials return to nature to reorient their conceptions of governance and their role in it - if they could not wander in nature in person, at least they could experience it through landscape paintings.

Another aspect which these paintings reveal is the manner in which these artists understood framing and composition. The nature which Doughty paints in *In Nature's Wonderland* has three layers. In the foreground is the bank of the river or pond on which the individual stands. It is dark, shadowed by the setting (or rising) sun. The middle ground, mediated by the water, is composed of the cliff and adjacent slope which are painted in a variety of mid-range tones. Lastly, the distant mountain ranges and pale-yellow sky compose the background of the landscape, almost too hazy to see clearly. The effect of the stepped progression of the painting is one which entrances and inspires the viewer. It captures their

[82] The position of the mountain in the center of the composition was a common theme in Northern Song artists. See the works of Li-Cheng, Juran, Xia Gua, and Mi Fu for further examples.

interest with lush and soothing imagery, leading them on to explore the landscape within (notice how the layers seem to lead one into the other), a journey of self-reflection and contemplation. It stimulates the viewers imagination, what would it be like to be the individual, blessed with such a wonderful environment? Durand's idea of "True Art" which conveys "high and holy meaning" is embodied here; the idealization of a landscape is presented to the viewer to evoke a notion of Romantic ideology - one which encourages emotional engagement and moral readjustment, an experience of nature without being in nature.

Travelers among Mountains and Streams is also composed of three layers: rocky terrain marks the first layer, the next layer contains lush foreground, a stream runs amidst a forested stretch of rocky road along which, barely visible from afar, is a group of pack-donkeys led by two men, one in front holding a cane, one in back with a whip. Most of the painting is commanded by the third layer: the colossal mountain which rises out of the mist, looming and sturdy. Guo Xi developed a unique system for describing these types of compositions. The layering Fan Kuan uses is characteristic of Northern Song landscapes and what Guo Xi refers to as "distances" (Hay et al. 2005, 386). The distance, according to Guo Xi's metric, being used in *Travelers among Mountains and Streams* is that of "high distance" (ibid); we crane our neck[83] to gaze up at the majestic mountain. The effect of this distance emphasizes the immensity of the mountain. Guo Xi characterizes the primary effect as "lofty grandness" - the height of the mountain is a spectacle but also a message. Looking up at something implies worship, respect, hierarchy, order. Much like one looks up at the emperor, looking up at a mountain inspires feelings of reverence. It also reminds the viewer of their place in the order of things; always small compared to the "lofty grandness" of the mountain.

A look at another set of paintings will help reveal more comparisons. Doughty's allusive imagery was only one take on landscape painting among the various styles which the Hudson River School produced. Where he used exclusively natural imagery to create experience and suggest truths, others used

[83] Quite literally crane - *Travelers among Mountains and Streams* is over six feet tall.

much more explicit imagery to accomplish similar means. Examples of the direct allegorical landscape styles of which some Hudson River School artists partook, can be found in Thomas Cole's *Voyage of Life* (1842) series. This collection is a series of four canvases titled *Childhood, Youth, Manhood,* and *Old Age*.

Similarly, Fan Kuan's *Travelers among Mountains and Streams* is not the only type of landscape painting to come out of the Song dynasty. Xia Gui's (夏珪, 1180–1230) *Pure and Remote View of Streams and Hills* (n.d.) is another representative of the way landscape artists portrayed nature as sacred in their work. Xia Gui was a court-painter for Emperor Ningzong (1195–1224) and his work was highly regarded by artists and officials alike ("Xia Gui – China Online Museum" n.d.). Although he is representative of the Southern school of painting, this piece is still relevant for its similarity of style.

Cole was pursuing what he referred to as a "higher style of landscape" ("The Departure" n.d.). This higher style of painting showed more than literal or emotional truth found in nature, it used nature as an allegorical tool. In the case of *Voyage of Life*, the series of four paintings tracks the life of a man (or the universal human) from birth to death. He emerges as a child on a boat from within a dark cave, guided by an angel through the lush land which opens in front of him. In *Youth* he departs from the angel, forging his own path as the river takes him along blooming and fortuitous banks towards a seemingly otherworldly utopian structure. The scenery takes a turn in *Manhood*, the flourishing greenery and gentle stream of youth gives way to desolate rock and foreboding rapids. Lastly, *Old Age* shows the man leaving the hard rocks of manhood, once again reunited with the angel, taken out to the calm sea, the light shining invites him heavenwards.

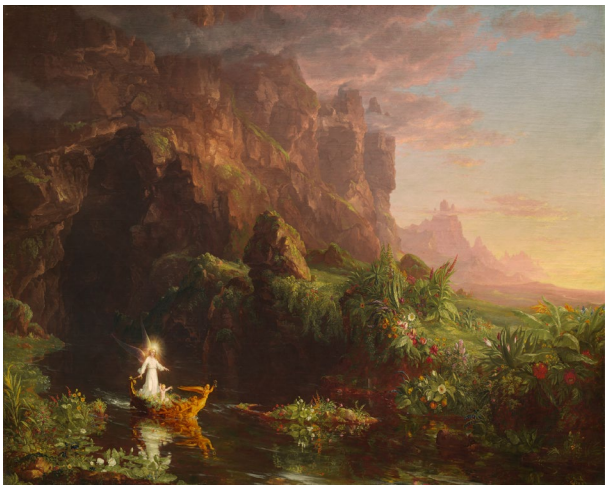

Figure 1.2. Thomas Cole, *Voyage of Life: Childhood*, 1842, oil on canvas, 52.9 x 76.9 in. (134.3 x 195.3 cm). National Gallery of Art.

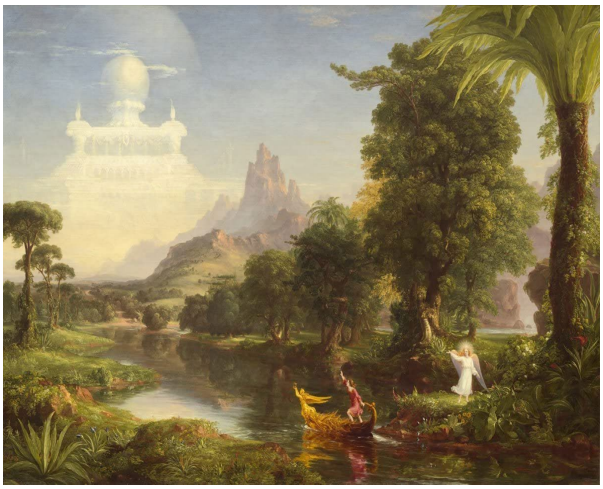

Figure 1.3. Thomas Cole, *Voyage of Life: Youth*, 1842, oil on canvas, 52.9 x 76.8 in. (134.3 x 194.9 cm). National Gallery of Art.

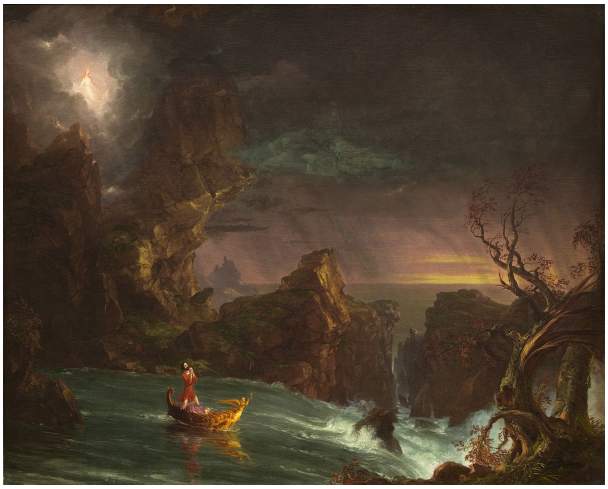

Figure 1.4. Thomas Cole, *Voyage of Life: Manhood*, 1842, oil on canvas, 52.9 x 79.8 in. (134.3 x 202.6 cm). National Gallery of Art.

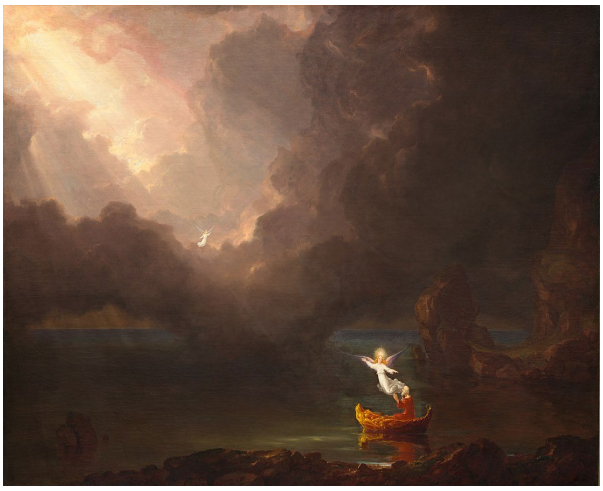

Figure 1.5. Thomas Cole, *Voyage of Life: Old Age*, 1842, oil on canvas, 52.5 x 77.3 in. (133.4 x 196.2 cm). National Gallery of Art.

A variety of obvious factors differentiate the type of paintings the *Voyage of Life* series are and the type of painting *In Nature's Wonderland* is. Like Doughty, Cole uses nature to facilitate a philosophical and contemplative mood, with more explicitly religious tones. Cole tries to communicate existential truths through this series and does so through a few parables, the most primary of which is life as framed in the language of nature: a journey along a river, with twists and turns, calm and rough spots. He uses several visual nature symbols to convey feeling, experience, the natural elements of each painting corresponding to the stage of human life. But he also employs human/religious symbolism as well: the blunt-force

imagery of an angel immediately calls to mind religious - specifically biblical - meaning. But instead of using the biblical figures as the centerpiece, the main purveyor of meaning, in the image, Cole places them amidst nature, equal in their importance and meaning. Unlike earlier Christian art where landscape primarily was background, context, Cole and the landscapists of the nineteenth century used a mixture of human and natural imagery to convey meaning.

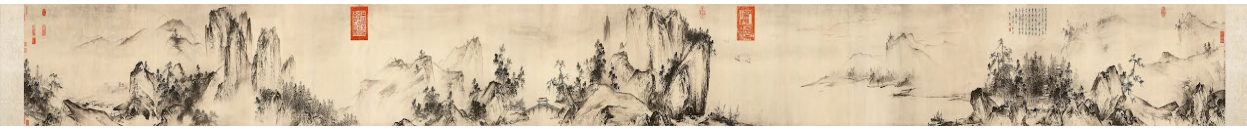

Figure 1.6. Xia Gui, *Pure and Remote View of Streams and Hills*, n.d., ink on paper, 18.3 x 350 in. (46.5 x 889.1 cm). National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Chinese artists engaged in a similar type of metaphor but were implicit in their imagery. As seen above, Song dynasty artists tended to imbed meaning and allegory in the forms of nature rather than relying on explicitly religious symbolism - like angels or crosses. Xia Gui's *Pure and Remote View of Streams and Hills* also exemplifies the type of allegory and symbolism which Guo Xi speaks about in his discussion of distances. This scroll is typical of "level distance" in which the viewer is supposed to be looking at nearby mountains from atop another mountain (Hay et al. 2005, 386). According to Guo Xi, "The idea of level distance is of spreading forth to merge into mistiness and indistinctness," (ibid). This distance creates the impression that one is looking outwards directly at eye-level; the scenery unfolds before you but as the distance grows greater, fades into indistinctness, shrouded by mist and other obstacles. Unlike Fan Kuan's piece which embodied Guo Xi's "high distance", the effect of which is "lofty grandness", level distance is more familiar, and approachable (ibid). Rather than being towered-over, reminiscent of hierarchy and feeling insignificant, level distance landscapes encourage engagement, one should feel themselves fusing with the scenery, part of the cycle of things - traversing its foreground,

fading into its distances. The messaging is much more subtle and intertwined with the natural imagery. Cole, by comparison, strengthens the allegory by using both natural and explicitly symbolic imagery.

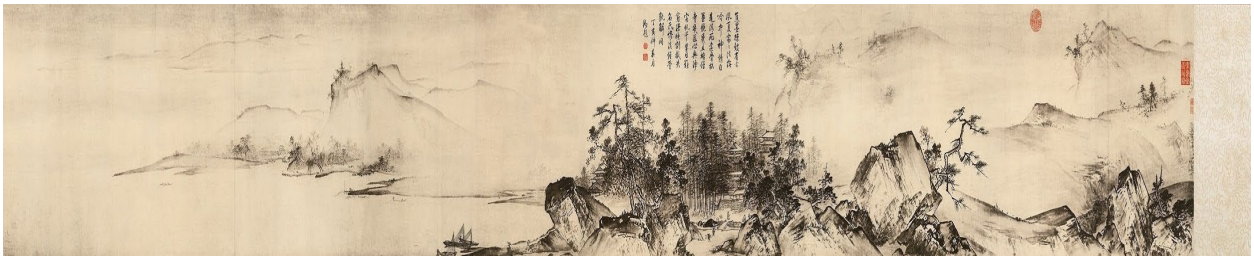

Figure 1.7. Xia Gui, *Pure and Remote View of Streams and Hills*, detail, n.d., ink on paper, 18.3 x 350 in. (46.5 x 889.1 cm). National Palace Museum, Taipei.

However, in both cases, there is a dialogue and connection between religious and natural symbolism. The angel and man are never given more import than nature. The two work in unison to create the allegory, they strengthen each other, reinforcing parables and symbolism of the other. In the Chinese tradition, the sacred symbolism of nature is strengthened by its association with sages, mystics, and monasteries. Xia Gui may have included a monastery in his *Pure and Remote View of Streams and Hills*, to the right (see figure 1.7). Similar to how the Buddha's image lent mysticism and religious significance to nature and nature shared its allure with the image of the Buddha during the Six Dynasties period (Shaw 1988, 197) so too the Christian image of the angel and the man shed meaning onto nature as it does to them.

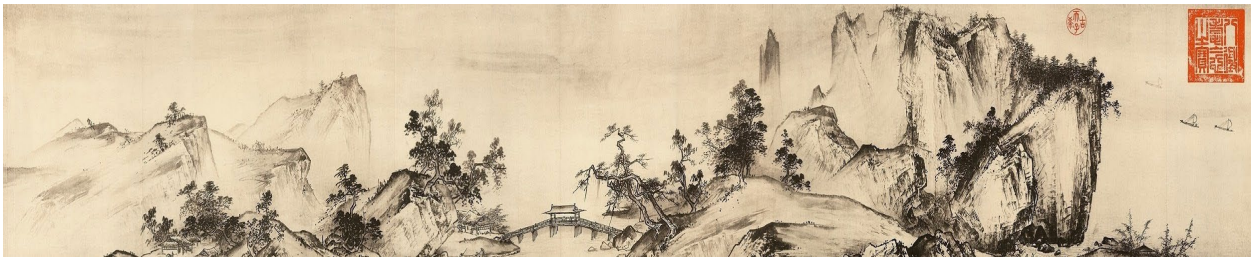

Figure 1.7. Xia Gui, *Pure and Remote View of Streams and Hills*, detail, n.d., ink on paper, 18.3 x 350 in. (46.5 x 889.1 cm). National Palace Museum, Taipei.

But the balance of human figures in landscape paintings was a delicate one. Both Durand and Guo Xi specify parameters for the inclusion of people. Durand comments on this in his eighth *Letter on Landscape Painting*, drawing a fine line: "whenever the human figure becomes paramount, and gives to the picture a significance independent of, and superseding the sentiment of the landscape, it is no longer

legitimate landscape," (1855h). Any superfluous or decorative use of figures only distracts from the image; when the figure becomes the centerpiece of the painting it is no longer a landscape painting. Durand continues, "But when in the human form exerts an influence in unison with the sentiment of inanimate nature, increasing its significance without supplanting it, the representative character of the landscape is not affected," (ibid).

Figure 1.7. Xia Gui, *Pure and Remote View of Streams and Hills*, detail, n.d., ink on paper, 18.3 x 350 in. (46.5 x 889.1 cm). National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Guo Xi makes similar comments in *Lofty Message of Forests and Streams*. He explained, "Concentrating on figures leads to vulgarity," (Hay et al. 2005, 385). A landscape painting cannot be a landscape painting if its focus is human figures. Conversely, "Water has the mountain as its face, huts and pavilions as eyes and eyebrows, anglers as its soul," (ibid, 386). A landscape can have some human evidence or presence to further glorify the landscape or help appeal to the viewer. The relationship of figures - of human presence - in landscapes is varying but should never be overbearing. Xia Gui demonstrates the perfect balance: small, almost insignificant, figures appear sporadically in the scroll. Several features about the figures are noteworthy. Firstly, they are obviously small, dwarfed by nature; nature is a force, overwhelming and immense, dwarfing the significance of mankind. Second, the figures are most likely not aristocrats; they travel on foot, carrying their wares, unattended by servants or lavish travel accommodations - they are simple folk, not the cultural elites to which Guo Xi was addressing his treatise. The admiration of a simple life was among the desirable qualities of a "gentleman" - a quality Romantics valued as well. Third, these people are temporary; although they are permanent in Xia Gui's depiction, in action they are merely passing through, transient. The nature around them, in contrast, is longer lasting and stable; it will be there long after the people pass. Again, the idea conveyed is nature as

a moral guide,[84] a sacred emblem reflecting and instructing the civil world. What is clear, however, is that Xia Gui wanted the viewer to feel insignificant before nature. Both traditions agree that the use of figures must be restricted to when those figures bolster the message which nature is trying to convey and can never overshadow the landscape.

Pure and Remote View of Streams and Hills is particularly demonstrative of the sheer size some of these paintings could assume. Measuring almost thirty feet long, the scroll was a lot to take in at once and cannot be seen clearly in its entirety here. The use of grand scale is not coincidence: for landscape paintings to achieve the transportive effect which both traditions hope they do, one should be engulfed by the image, it should occupy one's entire field of vision. Not only does the big size allow for more landscape to be shown and seen, it also helps replicate the sensation which these artists wished to evoke. In the West, the feeling of the sublime was one of being overwhelmed, terrified, astonished. Song dynasty artists echoed a similar sentiment, although they did not name the phenomenon. Guo Xi said, "Landscapes are vast things. You should look at them from a distance. Only then will you see on one screen the sweep and atmosphere of mountain and water," (Hay et al. 2005, 381).

By studying actual landscape painting examples from each tradition, we have been able to establish that the values and beliefs which artists like Guo Xi and Asher B. Durand wrote about actually manifest in the art of their time. Although the painting style of each tradition is radically different, the two share much in common. Ideas of what should be included in a landscape and how it should be portrayed stretch across cultures and time, connecting Chinese and American artists.

Conclusion: Landscapes Across Time and Space

Over the course of this thesis we have delved deep into two artistic movements. In the process we have seen what religious, historic, technological, and artistic influences have played a role in shaping the

[84] The idea of unity and endurance of mountains and nature as a symbol of stable governance and the ordered state is a persistent theme which appears throughout discussion of Song dynasty painting (Yuan, Fong, and Watt 1996, 123). Guo Xi alludes to this in his various descriptions of the natural world.

unique notions of sacred nature which both America and China held at one point. Through the dissection of the *Letters on Landscape Painting* by Asher B. Durand and Guo Xi's *The Lofty Message of Forests and Streams*, the complex tapestry of beliefs, practices, and associations which made up the cultural mind frames of their time came to light and revealed how each culture revered and respected nature. The texts and paintings studied here have shown how these artists conceived of art and their artistic process.

Both case studies share striking similarities. The core of both ideologies traces back to a foundational set of religious or cultural values. In the case of nineteenth century America, Romanticism fueled cultural appreciation and sanctification of nature. Concepts like the sublime, the merging of the conflicting epistemologies of religion and science, created a paradigm of religiosity which was not grounded in any particular religion; a new source of religion could be found in the expanses of nature. Reconciling rivalling foundations of knowledge - religious and scientific - created a middle ground, one which fused the emotional, subjective, and experiential tenets of religion with the existential and modern elements of the empirical gaze. This new understanding of reality, one which emphasized both the factuality of existence and the subjectivity of experience, was embodied by Romantic poets, artists, and thinkers in nature. For Song dynasty China, Daoism and Buddhism counteracted Confucian emphasis on social order. Neo-Confucianism combined the naturally oriented moral and ethical systems of Daoism and Buddhism with the civilly oriented systems derived from Confucianism into a hybrid ideology – one which emphasized intense observation and contemplation of natural objects, perceiving their material and spiritual characteristics. The result was a new model of moral and ethical belief: one which appreciated material reality for its spiritual qualities. The resulting attitudes of both traditions favored a view of nature for its sacred symbolism and moral instructiveness.

In both the West and in China, a reevaluation of the merits of nature came because of disruption to established civil order. The total restructuring of life which the industrial revolution forced on the Western world created a strong reaction. People across the West sought escape from crowded, commercialized, impersonal city life in nature. Nature was suddenly seen as a moral force, a spiritual, and physical sanctuary, and necessary antithesis of urban society. In China, a series of political upheavals

after the fall of the Han and Tang dynasties dislodged the strict adherence to Confucian ideology. As more cultural elites, running from political persecution or protesting corruption, encountered nature, an appreciation for the natural world resulted in more followers of Daoist and Buddhist philosophy. As they returned to civil service, these new values jostled against old Confucian standards, coalescing into a new respect for nature. The new moral order balanced natural needs with civil obligations - nature became the ideal model.

The resulting ideology which emerged from America and China saw nature, in contrast with artificial society, as a sacred space. Each considered nature a moral instructor - a guide which showed people how life should be lived. For urban Americans, it spoke to values of freedom, interpretation, and individualism. In Song dynasty China, scholar-officials perceived lessons of social structure, obligations to oneself and to one's society, and self-care. Nature taught these people as much about themselves as it did about the society they lived in. Because of the respite and reflection nature provided for them, Romantic Americans' and Song dynasty literati came to revere nature; to see it as a temple or a sanctuary wherein they could encounter themselves and the divine.

In both cases, landscape painting rose to popularity from the new paradigm of sacred nature. People yearning to experience some semblance of sacredness produced and bought painted versions of nature. The paintings became a type of shrine, a piece of sacred nature - and all the values it imparted - in one's home.

Landscape artists in each country capitalized and contributed to the wave of naturalistic passion. Artists like Asher B. Durand and Guo Xi created complex systems of practice, theory, and rhetoric around their craft. Direct exposure to and study of nature, fine articulations of the balance of compositional elements (such as human-to-nature ratios, distances, and brush technique), and a transcendence above technical skill to an ideal of spontaneity formed the basis of a system of rhetoric and practice around the creation of these landscape shrines. The traditions employed grand-scale paintings, dramatic and idealized images, and complex systems of symbolism and allegory to foment the connection between the paintings and their sacred sources.

However, the two traditions also differ from each other in several important and revealing ways. Each tradition started on completely different ideological bases. Prior to Romanticism, the Western world was dominated by two modes of moral and epistemological orders: religion (read: Christianity) and science. Neither of these two systems placed any special significance or importance on nature. Each understood existence according to its own rules - nature was just another thing to be categorized. Romanticism combined the worship of religion with the empiricism of science to produce the reverence of nature which became popular towards the late eighteenth century. By contrast, China's history of respect and attention to the natural world traces back to its origins. Daoism revered and admired nature, Daoist beliefs existed long before the Song dynasty. The confluence of Confucian and Daoist ideology was a process which had been unfolding for centuries, unlike the relatively rapid formation of Romanticism. In China, reverence for nature, nature as a sacred space, had long existed as a cultural belief and practice.

Furthermore, the underlying theologies from the two countries was fundamentally different. As a result, the way these cultures perceived, practiced, and wrote about nature religion was different. In the West, Abrahamic religions had instilled the concept of a single creator God. One who was manifest in all things but was itself one being. In China, animism was a common belief; gods and spirits could inhabit natural objects. For Westerners, seeing the spark of the divine in nature was a connection to a specific being, a singular source. The Romantic ideals – the individualist and divine values which they perceived in nature - were tied to the concept of a singular deity. In China, sacredness in nature was a part of a system of spirits and energies. The Neo-Confucian ideals – where nature imparted lessons on where the individual belonged in the system – reflected the systemic animistic beliefs.

The historical context of each tradition is drastically different as well. In America, the rise of landscape painting derived from the flowering of a new nation. It was the first great domestic art movement, one which reflected both the political and cultural history and future of the United States. Because the reverence for nature in America arose from a reaction against the industrial revolution as well as swelling nationalism, the sacred values which nature impart were focused on personal freedoms and

self-cultivation. In China, landscape painting, and the idealization of nature as sacred came from the repeated rending of a nation. As China went through several centuries of repeated formation and generations of squabbling and corruption, the image of civilization was not nearly so solidified. In the space created by doubt and wariness of societal values over generations of political unrest, a reverence and respect for the stability and un-civilization-ness of nature was able to lodge itself firmly into Chinese cultural doctrine, Daoism provided the basis on which to build a new system of belief. In the Song dynasty, Neo-Confucian conceptions of nature as sacred came about from political instability and Daoist philosophy. The sacred values which nature held for them were centered around civil society and political structure.

The two differ in art history as well. The Western art world only came to recognize landscape painting as a discrete category towards the sixteenth century. Even after that, human figures dominated the arts for centuries. When Western art finally arrived at a critical and cultural respect for landscape painting, the art form was already rooted in human-centric ideology. As such it was constantly defined against and vied with history painting and portraiture for artistic freedoms and expressive values. In China, landscape art stretched back to at least the Zhou dynasty (1046-314 BCE). The movement was long in development and had many scholars and practitioners over the centuries; the genre only arrived at its height during the Song dynasty, a peak production of literature about and art of landscapes.

As has been demonstrated, the landscape painting movements of Romantic America and Neo-Confucian China share many similarities and differences. Both resulted from and contributed to systems of belief and practice which held nature as a source of sacredness. Guo Xi and Asher B. Durand shared a number of beliefs and ideals which showed themselves in their writing and art. Some broad theses can be drawn from these comparisons: social, cultural, and political turmoil causes societies, seeking new solutions and alternative approaches to their problems, to reorient their value systems to other paradigms - in this case, reactions against unstable urban and political life caused faith in civil value systems to be reconciled with perceived natural value systems; when humans turn to nature, we see it as sacred because it allows us to reflect on ourselves from a removed vantage; nature, like other environments humans

interact with, changes in character and significance based on the specific needs of the people and the time; the arts are usually implicated in the epistemological systems of their time – Romanticism influenced American landscapes, Neo-Confucianism shaped the style and rhetoric of Song dynasty landscapes; the arts play an important role in constituting and validating cultural beliefs – Romantic art reflected, supported, and cultivated belief and development of Romantic ideology, same with Song dynasty art and Neo-Confucian ideology.

My studies of landscape paintings and sacred spaces have just begun; there is still much to learn even regarding these two traditions. As these topics continue to be studied, many questions arise which are worth investigating: what are other culture's landscape traditions, and do they share similar histories, beliefs, and artistic traits? The two traditions studied here happen to be distinct and copiously studied. Do other cultures have similar genres which are comparable to these, albeit with different contexts and systems of rhetoric, and practice? Do they have historical, religious, and political intrigue similar to those studied here? How do these various elements shape landscape art around the world? Do similar phenomenon, such as civil unrest, conflicting value systems, and epistemological developments cause different effects elsewhere? Are there some societies which have similar histories of practice but the form and development of the movements looks fundamentally different? The movements we looked at happen to be similar in style and rhetoric but what other forms of landscape painting are there? How can the definition of landscape be expanded? How might other cultures understand natural landscape and its implications? How do other societies understand their landscape art movement and the role it plays in their social system? Much has happened since the movements studied in this thesis; is there a changing significance of nature in art and in secular ideals of sacredness in China and America? How have the ideas found in this paper developed overtime? Is there any connection between what was believed then and now? Is it possible to study epistemological and artistic trends of today to predict or understand future developments in those fields?

As we continue to develop our societies and ourselves, these questions are worth asking. My hope is that readers of this thesis come away knowing more about these two magnificent artistic traditions and

with a desire to scrutinize the role nature plays in their own lives. Perhaps you too will find new appreciations and connections with nature - the paint brush is never out of reach.

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