

Images and Codes: The Problem of Reading Art

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Abstracts

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Landscaping My Mind: New Perceptions on Representing the Idea of “You” in Early Seventeenth-Century Garden Paintings

It is often said that *zaoyuan* 造园 (“to create a garden”) reached its peak in late Ming (1550–1644). Although much research has been done on the discursive practices surrounding the idea of late Ming gardens, rethinking the transformation in pictorial representation of garden space of the period has been somewhat lacking. This paper examines the importance of the idea of *you* 游 (traveling) in shaping continuous visual spaces in late Ming garden paintings, which led to an unprecedented perception of garden landscaping. Representing the idea of *you* 游 (traveling) has a long tradition in monumental landscape paintings—it was an important way for literati painters to express the true rhythm of human interaction with the natural world during their journeys. But representing the idea of traveling became influential in garden paintings only in the late Ming. Two masterpieces of the time—Wu Bin’s 吴彬 (active c. 1583–1626) *Spring Party at the Shao Garden* 勺园修禊图 (1615) and Zhang Hong’s 张宏 (1577–1652?) *Zhi Garden album* 止园图册 (天启四年 Tianqi Sinian, 1624)—are typical examples of this new perception of spatial representation.

Moreover, the visual evidence of *shi* 实 (naturalistic) and *xu* 虚 (illusionary) found in both works complicates the idea of traveling. Such a way of representing the late Ming garden enshrined the idea of *qu* 趣 (pleasure) in the paintings. This pleasure consists of the visual experiences of artists, viewers, and owners, respectively. Firstly, artists conveyed their concerns of miniaturizing *shijing shanshui* 实景山水 (the real natural world) by representing the idea of traveling in their compositions to create visual pleasures. Secondly, for viewers, the integrated composition of continuous scenes offered a vivid pictorial guide to *youyuan* 游园, which means traveling in the garden; pleasure came from the process of viewing the image—traveling in a landscape which was not merely a natural existence, but a cultural practice, a reflection of men’s minds. Thirdly, the owner desired to show his cultural identities through the integrally designed visual space; for him, such a pleasure came from visually exhibiting the *ya* 雅 (elegance) of his inner world to the public, and from leading viewers in travel around his elegant mind, as well as to tour in a more subjective space. Thus, philosophically speaking, the idea of *fenshen* 分身 (subjectivity) became readable in garden images. The painting was an

omniscient self-representation of the owner. Thus, a garden *is* oneself; the garden painting in the early seventeenth century can be seen as a visual biography of oneself.

On the other hand, the emergence of this new perception in garden paintings also exerts its socio-cultural impacts on later theories of landscape architecture (*Zaoyuan lilun* 造园理论) like *Yuanye* 园冶 (1631). I suggest that the new way to visually represent space might inspire the pursuit of *huayi* 画意 (picturesque) in landscaping practices, which had been widely repeated in those gardening theories. Considering this specific relationship between painting and architecture at that time, the new perception in garden paintings may have indicated that the spatial representation and aesthetic value were on their way to a new era—a version of modernity.

Ja Won Lee

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Pursuing Antiquity: Chinese Objects in Nineteenth-Century Korean Paintings

My paper examines an important trend in art collecting and its impact on visual culture in nineteenth-century Korea. With particular attention to the concepts of “cultural translation,” I demonstrate how Chosŏn collectors shaped the cultural pattern of art production as active agents and how painters incorporated Chinese antiques in their works of art. What impact did the circulation and appropriation of images of ancient objects have on artistic developments? How did Chosŏn artists select certain types of Chinese antiques for their paintings? To answer these questions, I examine Yi Hyŏngnok’s (1808–after 1863) *Books and Scholarly Utensils* (*Ch’aekkŏri*), featuring books, bronze vessels, ink stones, and auspicious flowers and compare them with Chinese illustrated catalogues such *Xiqing gujian* 西清古鑑 of the Qing dynasty (1644–1912). My project highlights the ways in which the objects were transmitted and received differently in Korean and Chinese culture and recaptures the intellectual and artistic motivations of collectors and artists in Korea.

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The Limits of “Reading Art”: Methodology and Ideology in the Study of Fu Baoshi’s Landscape Painting of the 1960s

Some viewers of art often rely on the terminology and research approaches established in the field of art history to articulate what they see in a work of art. However, this paper argues that some of these languages and methods can become rather limiting when they are used to analyze works of art that are created in a different ideological setting. To demonstrate this, I use Fu Baoshi’s (1904–1965) *Xiling Gorge* produced in 1960 as a case study because it allows me to investigate how different ideological environments impacted viewers’ method of reading a painting. By delving into the production of the discourse of *shidai jingshen* (the spirit of the era) in the PRC in the late 1950s, I argue that it had become a dominating ideology, which embodied the radically heroic spirit of the Great Leap Forward. Mediated by this ideology, Fu Baoshi’s landscapes painting increasingly bespoke a dramatic sense of space as reflected in his *Xiling Gorge*. I also explore how this painting rhetorically recorded Fu’s extraordinary experience of a nighttime navigation through the Three Gorges as a result of the ongoing state project of strengthening the shipping industry in inner China in the late 1950s. My research shows how art writers and press journalists in the PRC of the early 1960s also aligned their reading of this painting with the discourse of the “spirit of the era.” By contrast, curators in Hong Kong and the United States of the 1960s, who did not subscribed to this ideological discourse, often interpreted or recontextualized Fu Baoshi’s landscape painting as the modernist *other* in China in the mid-twentieth century.

Through this case study, this paper seeks to analyze the connections between research methodology and ideology. It argues that the research methodology is not politically neutral. However, it is the product of a certain ideological system in a particular time and setting. In the end, this paper proposes that we may need to abandon some of the firmly established beliefs in our art historical language and research system if we want to fully “read” a work of art that is created in another ideological setting.

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Reading Text, Reading Tea

In sixteenth-century Japan, elite warriors and merchants practiced *chanoyu*, a complex and highly structured form of tea drinking and object appreciation. These tea men collected objects from all over the world, which they repurposed as tea utensils and used to create object assemblages, or *toriawase*, for display in the tea room. After a tea event had concluded, both

host and guest would record in diaries what objects comprised the *toriawase* on display and their thoughts about those objects.

Intended to be temporary, *toriawase* present a unique set of challenges for art historical study. While many tea objects used in sixteenth-century *toriawase* survive, the display as a whole only endures as a written description in the diaries. The diary author performed an act of translation by recording in words his visual and tactile experience of the *toriawase*. The art historian must decode the written description of the *toriawase*, even though it stands at a remove from the *toriawase* itself. Tea men intentionally left out information from their diaries, as they expected the reader to be conversant in tea practice. By reimagining a *toriawase*, I am not only recovering lost information, but also reenacting the mental processes of recollection and reconstruction that the tea men would have doubtlessly performed themselves when reading tea diaries.

My paper will attempt to address the problem of studying works of art that no longer exist. Limiting my focus to a few diary entries, I hope to show that through the aid of background knowledge, close reading, and comparative analysis, one can deduce many characteristics of a given *toriawase*, including those that were not written down. For example, the spaces in which *toriawase* were assembled are rarely described beyond their location, size, and the presence of a recessed space for display. Additionally, an entry might mention a specific tea object, but not describe it in detail. In such cases, other diary entries sometimes provide useful contextual information or even a physical description of that very object. I will demonstrate that the ability to navigate the boundaries between what is knowable and unknowable, despite the four-century gap, is an essential skill for the scholar of *chanoyu*.

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The Power of Ambiguity: Bada Shanren's Personal Marks

Bada Shanren (1626–1705), a prince of the Ming dynasty and a famous literati painter after the Manchu conquest, elevated Chinese art to a high mode of self-expression. While his flower and bird paintings may be thought of as abstract and simple images, his accompanying language—including poems, signatures, personal marks and seals on paintings—is full of obscure references and linguistic puzzles. Thus, Bada's art is famous for its uncertainty of meaning. Deciphering his difficult language has been a task of modern scholarly inquiry for decades.

This paper focuses on Bada's use of rare characters in his works of art, particularly his personal marks, and it shifts the concern from the artist's creative process to the scholars' reading process. This paper examines the effectiveness of the underlying codes of those personal marks and discusses how the scholars integrate and balance the calligraphy, texts, images, and the artist's biography in their receptions.

For example, a personal mark first inscribed in 1694 combines obscure forms of characters. This paper will analyze two distinct interpretations of this mark, and will reveal the

potential multiplicity of connections between the artist's life and artwork itself. That is, many scholars regard the mark as the combination of four individual characters *San yue shi jiu*, meaning "nineteenth day of the third month." This is precisely the date that the last Ming emperor hanged himself, and this mark is believed to conceal Bada's lamentation for the former Ming. The paper will investigate how diffuse cues such as the organization of the mark, the artist's life experience, and the event of the last Ming emperor's death are combined as a coherent process through scholarly reading, and how this interpretation of such a small mark strongly influences scholars' reception of the entire work of art. Some scholars rebut that the mark is actually a rare form of the ancient characters *Shi you san yue*, meaning "the thirteenth month" or "intercalary month." This reading relies more on an analysis of the mark's structure and its precedents in epigraphy. Here, the personal mark turns out to be Bada's playing with scripts, and cannot convey any specific self-expression. In addition to examining this mark, the paper discusses personal marks such as *Ge Xiangru Chi*, "I and Xiangru stutter."

This paper aims to explore to what degree the knowledge of an artist's biography informs a viewer's interpretation of a work of art and, in turn, how the artwork acts upon one's reading.

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From Kinnara to Kalavinka: On the Autonomy of Image in Buddhist Transmission from India to China

In the study of Buddhist art, it is common practice to "read" an image in relation to texts. However, such a method is based on assumptions that, throughout the development of Buddhism, image was either synchronized with or subordinate to text. While compilation and translation of texts played an irreplaceable role in the transmission of Buddhism, beliefs and concepts were also circulated orally and through the mobility of objects along the bustling Silk Road. Moreover, artisans had their own creative process. In this light, this paper elucidates the parallel and occasionally overlapping trajectories of text and image with the example of kalavinka (Ch. 迦陵頻迦, Skt. *kalaviṅka*) iconography in Chinese Buddhist art. "Kalavinka" refers to a hybrid creature with human head, torso, and arms, and bird wings, legs, and a billowing tail. The image enjoyed great popularity since the Tang dynasty (618–907), and its first appearance has been commonly traced back to Pure Land depictions around Dunhuang. However, the origin of kalavinka has been understood through Chinese Buddhist commentaries as a melodious mythical bird from the Himalayas. Nevertheless, this approach does not resolve the questions why there is no textual descriptions of its form and why there is no kalavinka iconography in the literature of Indian art. Therefore, this paper first reveals how the name "kalavinka" resulted from confusions in the translation of sūtras. Then, we focus on the image

itself and trace it back to the Indian kinnara at Sanchi and Ajanta, with consideration of pictorial programs of devotional art. We uncover that, regardless of changing beliefs and textual traditions, the kalavinka image not only preserved the form of kinnara prototype, but also retained much of its meanings after a millennium. This paper further illuminates how kalavinka iconography was formed in China through such pictorial and textual elaborations. As a result, kalavinka images were used to highlight the musicality and other-worldliness of Pure Land depictions and to evince worship of the central deity; they were also associated with visualization and recitation rituals. Our approach not only emphasizes the autonomy of image but also argues for a more nuanced relationship between image and text in the dynamic and unsystematic transmission of Buddhism.

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The Architectonic Reading of Spatial Representation in Three Paintings by Chen Chi-Kwan

The methods of decoding a painting, especially a Chinese landscape painting, are not limited to a visual or textual language analysis of the image itself, but sometimes include an architectural language analysis of the unfolded space represented in the image. My study examines the potential of architectonic reading in interpreting the creativity of the Chinese artist and architect Chen Chi-kwan (1921–2007). To investigate the question of where his imaginary realm of time and space come into being, I theoretically reconstruct the architectural space represented in his paintings, analyze the spatial sequence, and then compare them with modern representation techniques of actual space. This reading may precisely answer the question of how the artist consciously mediates perception, expression, and even empathy in his paintings that look similar to perspectives and representation in modern photographic technology. In order to demonstrate their fundamental difference despite their similar appearance, I compare the artistic representation in Chen's three paintings with photographic technology, i.e., chronophotography, panoramic imaging, and montage, by reconstructing and analyzing the painted spaces, respectively, a football field in *Impressions of an American Football Game* (1954), the Piazza San Marco in *Untitled* (1960), and an imaginary Chinese fishing village in *Yinyang2* (1985). To conclude, Chen's mind's eye reflected in these three paintings is, on one hand, the perception of bodily movements in a spatial sequence, referring to representational techniques of modern photography, and, on the other hand, the perception of oriental architecture aesthetics and features, referring to the Western modern architectural design. In addition, the perspective not only involves Chinese painting perspective—such as plane distance, high distance, deep distance—but also uses such traditional techniques to illustrate the sophisticated relationship between multiple layers of spaces, which are modern architectural design aesthetics and methods.