

山水

SHANSHUI

The great image has no shape 大象無形.

A look at China. Qiu Shihua's
contemporary landscape painting

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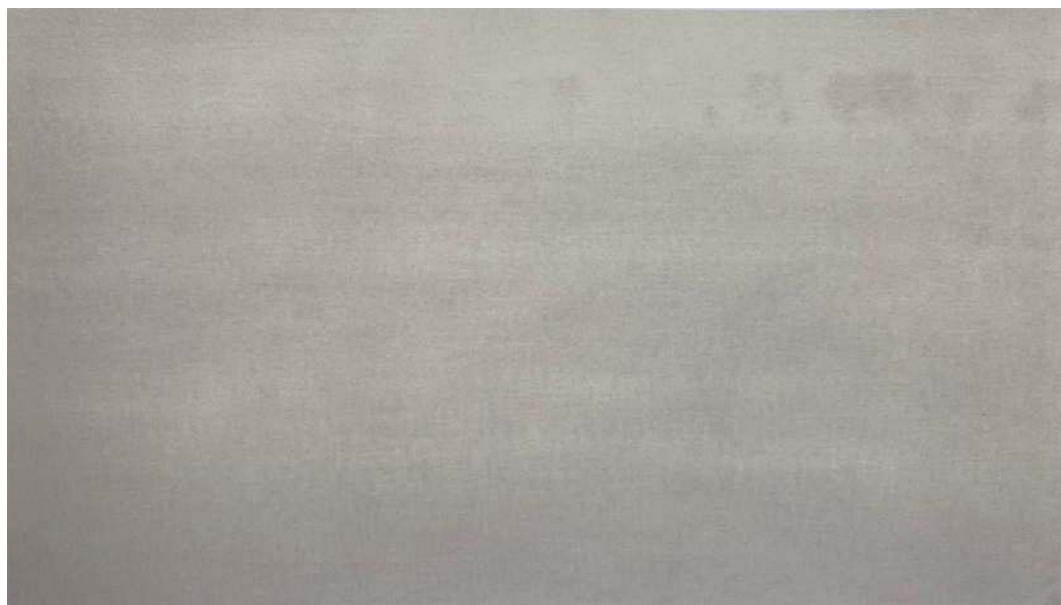
A look at China. Qiu Shihua's contemporary landscape painting

By; Dagmar Dotting

This article¹ is divided into two parts. The first section introduces the principle of Tao² using *Daode jing* and discusses the background. The second part tries to transfer these principles to the pictoriality in Chinese mountain-water painting.³

I.

Contrary to what might be expected from a philosophical treatise, I would like to start my lecture with a contemplative silence and invite you, without further commentary, to dive into the pictorial worlds of the contemporary Chinese artist Qiu Shihua.⁴ This is the picture for which I would now like to initiate you for a two-minute intensive encounter:



Qiu Shihua, *Untitled*, Oil on canvas, 110 x 193 cm, 2001

The title of my lecture refers fragmentarily to chapter (in consequence as §) 41 of the well-known *Daode jing* 道德經 by Laozi. This book is a collection of life wisdoms and is regarded as the cornerstone of the Taoist teaching, which is divid-

1 This article was realised at the Faculty of Humanities (FHS) of Charles University, Prague in the context of the research project *Life and Environment: Phenomenological Relations between Subjectivity and the Natural World* (Grantová agentura ČR, č. 401/15-10832S).

2 The arrangement of personal names is used as is customary in the respective cultures. This means that when Chinese or Japanese personal names are mentioned, the family name is in the first place. Quotations from German sources have been translated by the author and are always reproduced in the original source citation. For the term "sense" for Tao translated by Wilhelm, the author retains the term "Tao" as in the original. The transcription from Chinese corresponds to the Pinyin transcription.

3 The Chinese meaning of the so-called mountain-water painting (chin. *shān-shuǐ-huà* 山水畫) is based on the ancient Chinese idea of the origin of the world. The mountain, as a male principle and the water as a female principle, are interdependent in the creation of all things. The philosophy of the world in eternal change already lies within itself. This kind of painting, developed in the 2nd century CE, has changed up to the present only in its forms of expression, but not in its principles.

4 Qiu Shihua, born 1940 in Sichuan/China, lives and works today in Beijing and Shenzhen/China.

ed into two parts: The first deals with meaning (the Tao 道) and the second with life (De 德)⁵, with both parts intertwined. The origin of this collection is not clearly dated, but it is classified in "the time of the warring empires" (5th - 3rd century BC). According to Chinese tradition, Laozi is said to have lived during the time of the Spring and Autumn Annals in the 6th century BC. This period was marked by unrest and wars in China and was the heyday of Chinese philosophy,⁶ as many scholars thought about how peace and stability could be achieved again. There is also no certainty about whether the person Laozi actually existed, or whether the text is rather a collection of writings by various persons. Whether the "official" Li Er, (with the scholarly name Be Yang (Count Sun), later Lao Dan (old teacher), and then given the honorary name Laozi), really existed, is therefore strongly doubted today.

Since our view today would like to focus on the spiritual in China, we take a closer look at § 41, which can be found in the second part of *Daode jing*, and others:

上士聞道

"Higher people hear of the Tao

勤而行之

They diligently practice it

中士聞道

Average people hear of the Tao

5 Both terms can be translated in many ways. *Tao* 道: path, flow, principle and meaning; *De* 德: power, life and charisma, virtue, goodness. Since the following quotations are taken from the German translation by Richard Wilhelm, the slightly Christian aftertaste is inherent in this translation. Therefore no translation is taken over here for Tao. Tao is translated in the German version by Wilhelm with sense. Laotse, Taodeking, Übers. von Richard Wilhelm, dtv. Beck, München, 5. Aufl., 2010. For the American publication the translation by Derek Lin' is used with the Chinese original and the German translation of Wilhelm in the source. <https://taoism.net/tao/tao-te-ching-online-translation/>
6 Confucius (551 - 479 BC), Zhuangzi (365 - 290 BC), Mengzi (372 - 289 BC)

若存若

They sometimes keep it and sometimes lose it

下士聞道

Lower people hear of the Tao

大笑之

They laugh loudly at it

不笑不足以為道

If they do not laugh, it would not be the Tao

故建言有之

Therefore a proverb has the following:

明道若昧

The clear Tao appears unclear

進道若退

The advancing Tao appears to retreat

夷道若類

The smooth Tao appears uneven

上德若谷

High virtue appears like a valley

大白若辱

Great integrity appears like disgrace

廣德若不足

Encompassing virtue appears insufficient

建德若偷

Building virtue appears inactive

質真若渝

True substance appears inconstant

大方無隅

The great square has no corners

大器晚成

The great vessel is late in completion

大音希聲

The great music is imperceptible in sound

大象無形

The great image has no form

道隱無名

The Tao is hidden and nameless

夫唯道

Yet it is only the Tao

善貸且成

That excels in giving and completing everything."⁷

7 [https://taoism.net/tao/tao-te-ching-online-](https://taoism.net/tao/tao-te-ching-online-translation/)

What does this mean?

Chinese mountain-water painting is closely related to the idea of the Taoist world origin. The world emerges from the mutual conditionality of the bipolar principles of yin (female) and yang (male), which form an immanent closed spiritual system.⁸ In it, the Tao is always based on a movement of constant change. From its being, it accommodates the visible in the invisible and the hidden is always in correspondence with the unhidden. This correspondence behaves like indeterminacy in transition. The Tao is flowing and at the same time moves all things. The path of the Tao arises from this change. In the beginning, there are always the factors of Yin and Yang; through their change, the path - the Tao - arises. The Tao is therefore also to be understood as an "inner", as a hidden thing – the source of all phenomena whose reason is groundless. It is that which is enveloped in figurative absence and is therefore present.

“道隱無名

The Tao is hidden and nameless.”⁹

So it says in the above mentioned § 41. and in § 1, which decisively defines the concept of the whole book, the Tao, which is interpreted as unpronounceable:

§ 1 道可道 非常道

The Tao that can be spoken is not the eternal Tao

名可名 非常名

translation/; Laotse, *Taoteking. Das Buch vom Sinn und Leben*, Übers. aus dem Chinesischen v. Richard Wilhelm, dtv C. H. Beck, München, 5. Aufl., 2010, § 41, S. 53.

8 A widespread symbol of the principle is the *Taijitu* , in which the white Yang (light, hard, hot, male, active, movement) and the black Yin (dark, soft, cold, female, passive, calm) are represented opposite each other. The signs are also found in the *Yijing* ("Book of Changes"), which is dated to the time of the Western Zhou Dynasty (about 1045-770 BC).

9 Ibid.; cf. Laotse, § 41, p. 53.

The name that can be named is not the eternal name

無名天地之始

The nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth

有名萬物之母

The named is the mother of myriad things

故常無欲 以觀其妙

Thus, constantly without desire, one observes its essence

常有欲 以觀其徼

Constantly with desire, one observes its manifestations

此兩者 同出而異名

These two emerge together but differ in name

同謂之玄

The unity is said to be the mystery

玄之又玄 眾妙之門

Mystery of mysteries, the door to all wonders.”¹⁰

In Laozi's opening formula, the Tao is unnamed and is the source from which the forms, both the ideal (Greek *eidos*) and the creative forms, are in their essence constantly brought forth. The metaphor of flowing and the infinite source of creative power is also used in § 4:

“道沖而用之或不盈

The Tao is empty; when utilized, it is not filled up”¹¹

“Due to the version of the Tao, the "way", the Chinese Taoists (to me) seem to be the ones, among all religious and philosophers, who least insinuate or construct for the purpose of asserting an overall context of the phenomenon of life. (...) The formulas of the Laozi assign to beings and things an origin that neither appeals to faith nor counts on the persuasive power of a deduction, nor is based on the special background of a (mythical)

¹⁰ Ibid.; cf. Laotse, § 1, p. 9.

¹¹ Ibid.; cf. Laotse, § 4, p. 12.

history or a cosmology."¹² This is how the French sinologist François Jullien describes it.

Since the Tao does not hold on, it cannot be constituted. It is not a settlement and makes no systemic beginning. Since it has nothing absolute, it has no existential being, because with that it would lose its definition of being, which eludes any specification. Therefore the non-being contains at the same time the being which shows itself in another form (§ 1). Thus, the indeterminacy in the determinacy emerges here, i.e. the "there is" (chin. 有 *yōu*) and the "there is not" (chin. 無 *wu*) at the same time. This source ground always remains undifferentiated, diffused and changeable. A brief look at the etymology of the fourfold root of the Chinese sign for Being follows:

The reasoning that logic is not based on Being as existence but on Existence is shown in the fourfold root of the Chinese sign for Being. Referring to the Chinese root of the sign for Being, the following meanings arise:

shì 是 being (sein)

cún 存 being (sein)

zài 在 be located (sich befinden)

yōu 有 have/own (haben / besitzen)

Each aspect contains different nuances in the concept of existence. The *yōu* 有, as having, is to be spatially classified.

What does this mean for painting? Everything that 'there is' (有 *yōu*) has its beginning in 'there is not' or non-existence (無 *wu*) as § 1 says.

§ 40 天下萬物生於有

"The myriad things of the world are born of being

12 Jullien, François, *Das große Bild hat keine Form*, trans. from French into German Markus Sedlaczek, Fink Verlag, München, 2005, p. 37.

有生於無

Being is born of non-being."¹³

Jullien continues: "The more Chinese painting will detach itself from the representational function in the course of its development, the more it will approach and explicate this striving: If the painter achieves a work of "wisdom" by painting mountain peaks appearing and disappearing in the mist, or tree tops that appear and disappear, or a path running in and out, it is because he paints things less than objects placed in front, stretched out in their presence, but because he grasps them according to the logic of immanence, which reproduces them appearing-disappearing, and how in his stroke he encompasses the whole process - the "way", the Tao - that allows them to exist."¹⁴

Clearly this 'there is' (有 *yōu*) and at the same time 'there is not' or not-being (無 *wu*) is found in the emptiness of the mountain-water painting of the Chinese Song (Song 960 - 1279) - and Yuan time (Yuan 1279 -1368). Thus it is not only the free space in the picture which carries this emptiness, but in the present with which mountains and water are brought into the picture. They connect the visible and the invisible world by the *qi* (breath of life), which becomes noticeable within this correspondence of mountain and water. In the work of the Zen monk Yu Jian (13th century) *Mountain village in clearing mist*¹⁵ this correspondence reaches a degree of abstraction that reminds one of Western modernity.

The transformation and thus the course of *qi* is very clear in the work of Shitao (1642-1707), *Boats on the Yangtze*, in the mutual transformation of

13 Jullien, op. cit., p. 38.

14 Jullien, op. cit., p. 38 - 39.

15 See p. 63. Editor's Note.

潦倒清湘客因尋故舊過
買山無力住就枕宿奉寧
放眼江天外餘心付小亭扁舟
偕子顧而且不算丁

白夢江柳留別

林下人



停書之過
登舟極目



water as mist to mountain.

"Shitao (...) explains the one brush-stroke as "the origin of all that is given, the root of ten thousand apparitions. Its use is manifested in the spirit, it is hidden in man".(...)."¹⁶

A contemporary example is the Chinese artist Li Xi, who refers to Qiu in her work and thus combines classical Chinese art with contemporary art. "In her work, the choice of motifs, composition and painting technique bear witness to a profound engagement with Chinese culture, Taoism and the Buddhist religion. In her play of forms, she transfers the principle of being present and absent by transforming the lines in her ink painting like an abstract play of forms into scenic impressions. In doing so, she does not consciously control the flow of the line - the highest primacy of Chinese pictorial art - during the painting process in order to create a concrete form, but leaves it to the form itself to from the line flowing towards it. With this view, she takes up the principle of traditional mountain-water painting: the focus is on the expression of the image from within the artist and not on the realistic depiction of nature.

Thus, the seemingly abstract forms of the painting *Bardo-Mind Landscape* are transformed in the imagination of the viewer, first vaguely, then more and more clearly, into trees, clouds, waves or bizarre rock formations. The artist paints her own mind map in a state of meditative contemplation, in the state of a "soul landscape" which describes the intermediate state of

a *bardo*.¹⁷ According to the tradition of the Tibetan *Book of the Dead*, a person experiences various states of consciousness during his life, as well as before and during reincarnation; these experiences are stored in the subconscious. Li Xi elevates this metaphysical development of the mind to the subject of the picture and at the same time carries it out practically in the process of finding the picture by letting the forms - or, as Shitao puts it (...) - "that which lies beyond the outer edges of the world", flow from her own *bardo*.¹⁸

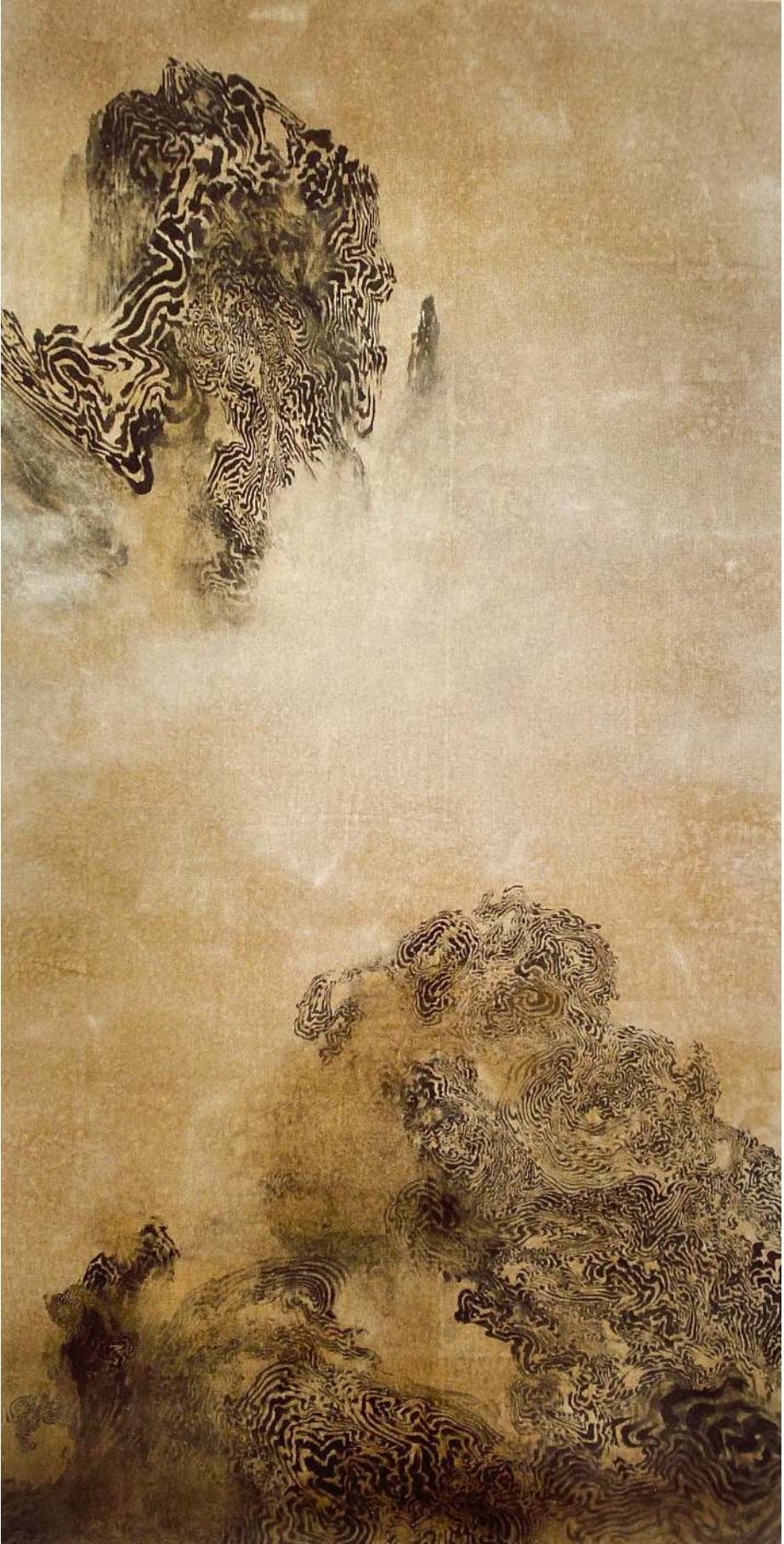
The circular non-being-being in it holds an immanent structure of the world, which is clouded with a naturalness, a world of continuity and dynamics as well as spontaneity. It makes no sense to ask where the water ends, where the mountain begins. The emptiness of the seemingly unpainted surface is the space in between, which is representative of what is hidden in the world, of "the dynamic

17 Bardo: In some schools of Buddhism, bardo (Tibetan བར་དོ་ Wylie: *bar do*) or *antarabhāva* (Sanskrit) is an intermediate, transitional, or liminal state between death and rebirth. It is a concept which arose soon after the Buddha's passing, with a number of earlier Buddhist groups accepting the existence of such an intermediate state, while other schools rejected it. In Tibetan Buddhism, *bardo* is the central theme of the *Bardo Thodol* (literally Liberation Through Hearing During the Intermediate State), the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. (...) Some of the earliest references we have to the "intermediate existence" are to be found in the Sarvāstivādin text the *Mahāvibhāṣa* (阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論). For instance, the *Mahāvibhāṣa* indicates a "basic existence" (本有), an "intermediate existence" (中有), a "birth existence" (生有) and "death existence" (死有) (CBETA, T27, no. 1545, p. 959, etc.). Here quoted after: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bardo>, 23.05.2018, 08.58 MEZ; El. The Tibetan Book of the Dead: Awakening Upon Dying. 2013. by Padmasambhava (Author), Chögyal Namkhai Norbu (Commentary), Karma Lingpa (Author), Elio Guarisco (Translator). Shang Shung Publications & North Atlantic Books.

18 Lenz, Katja in: Fischer, Peter (Hrsg.), *Shan-shui. Poesie ohne Worte? Landschaft in der chinesischen Gegenwartskunst*, Kunstmuseum Luzern, Ostfildern, 2011, p. 132.

16 Qiu Shitao, *Aufgezeichnete Worte des Mönches Bittermelone zur Malerei*, translated from Chinese into German and commented by Marc Nürnberger, Mainz, 2009, p. 9; here quoted after: Fischer, Peter (Hrsg.), *Shan-shui. Poesie ohne Worte? Landschaft in der chinesischen Gegenwartskunst*, Kunstmuseum Luzern, Hantje Cantz & Kunstmuseum Luzern, Ostfildern, 2011, p. 132.

Li Xi, *Bardo-Mind Landscape*, Mixed media on canvas, 320 x170 cm, 2009



law of reality".¹⁹

The emptiness is to be understood as the place where change takes place and from this empty space the possibility arises that its fullness only becomes apparent. In emptiness lies the possibility for people that through emptiness their hearts become a mirror of themselves and their world. In "contemplative action"²⁰, it is precisely by contemplating the emptiness in the heart²¹ - the original emptiness that man carries within himself and from which he draws the water as the source of all forms of manifestation - that it is sensitized. In rhythm with space and time, the law of transformation takes place in the world as a reflection of the heart.

Existence is, as the word itself says, emergence (lat. *ex-sistere*), an emergence from the undifferentiated source ground. But it is not the Tao itself that exists; it only exists in an as-if state. Here being refers to the root *cún* 存. As an example, Jullien trans-

lates it in § 41 with "Sunken! As if it might exist."²² The Tao thus does not behave as present in the form of a category of being; it not only retains a concealedness, but it is also linked to contingency in time. It is-there and is at the same time also not-there. Temporality is the aspect of the *cún* 存 in being. Thus it brings indeterminacy to the expression and within the mountain-water painting it can be recognized as a non-substantial 'in-between'.²³

Out of this indeterminacy meaning is formed and the essence of things emerges from it. That is why the formless form corresponds to that of an archetype. Or, as it is called in § 35, of an *imago mundi* (a large archetype), which already contains all forms, but which cannot itself be brought into a designed form, because otherwise it loses the claim of the 'great image'.

"There is a reality that comes up blurry and fused...
Born of heaven and earth,
Silent! Abysmal!"

(Laozi, § 25)²⁴

"Thus the formless precedes that which has form not only as a starting point or origin, but is its operating, generated basis from which that which has form continuously emerges. While that which has form is easy to imitate, the formlessness of the basis is difficult to grasp. But how is such a thing to be understood whose form cannot be observed, but whose

22 Trans. from Jullien in: Jullien, François, *Das große Bild hat keine Form*, trans. from origin French into German by Markus Sedlaczek, Fink Verlag, München, 2005, p. 48.

23 This 'in-between' is not a spatial or temporal interspace, but a *topoi*, a referencing place-holder on the basis of which "something" can only become substantially apparent. Example: The shadow needs the light but also a space in which the shadow can show itself. The shadow already contains the image, but is not the image itself.

24 Jullien, op. cit., p. 58.

19 Cheng, François, *Fülle und Leere. Die Sprache der chinesischen Malerei*, Merve, Berlin, 2004, p. 54.

20 Nishida, Kitarō, "Selbstidentität und Kontinuität der Welt", Übers. E. Weinmayr, in: Ohashi, Ryōsuke (ed.), *Die Philosophie der Kyōto-Schule*, Texte und Einführung, Verlag Alber, 2. Ed., Freiburg im Breisgau 2011, p. 87 – 88.

21 The term 'heart' here refers to the meaning in early Chan Buddhism, which later developed as Zen Buddhism in Japan. The heart as the spirit of the heart (心 chin. *xín*, 心 jap. *shin*) is to be provided here in connection with the spirit of the heart that acts like a 'world logo'. The heart mind contains all knowledge and so every little heart is connected to the big heart mind. The potential of the great Spirit of Heart is invested in every little Spirit of Heart. In this tradition, the process of knowledge is located in the heart mind and not in the consciousness process in the brain as in Western ideas. Spirit of the Heart does not mean the heart as an organ, but as a place of knowledge.

The emptying of the heart means to detach the heart mind from imaginary images, as part of the eightfold path (great vehicle), which is the basis in all Buddhist schools.

connection can be seen? Or, to put it another way, what is the nature of this formless form on which the painted form is based but does not paint it?"²⁵

Just this can be experienced well in the pictures of Qui Shihua. At first sight, this appears to us as a simple white surface. If the gaze lingers longer on these pictures, small shades and vaguely indistinct areas appear, which then develop into landscapes. Qui's pictures need time to unfold completely and can therefore be seen again and again. It is precisely the moment of the undifferentiated - the blurred - that gives this painting its quality and corresponds exactly to what the Daoist principle means. It is the emergence of the indeterminate that immerses the viewer in an atmosphere of the intangible. Let us look at the painting one last time²⁶.

II.

Qui Shihua's paintings were first shown in Germany in the exhibition *WeiBes Feld* at the Museum of Contemporary Art Hamburger Bahnhof/ Berlin 2012. In his interview on the exhibition *WeiBes Feld*, he comments on his paintings exhibited there as follows:

"There is no East and no West. No past, present or future.

It is all about the viewer. What the viewer sees in the painting is also in the painting.

The mythical is not perceptible, we only see the ordinary, but the mythical is in the ordinary.

Trust perception not words.

...confuse terms, perception is the essential."²⁷

Pictures are the expression of the specifically inner logic of recognizing cultures. They embody their own reality of the world. But how can we read works of art from China and Japan, which are influenced by Taoism and Chan/Zen, with a Western view? Do they open up to us at all with our visual convention or is it rather unnecessary to have another level of 'translation'?

Qiu's white landscape painting not only embodies a refusal of reliable visibility, but also sets in motion transitional processes that enable us to remain suspended in threshold states. They require the viewer to pause in order to unfold in his diffuse and milky imagery. Only after longer contemplation do worlds of images open up which reflexively suggest their own pictorial realities, only to dissolve again into their materiality when approaching the canvas more closely. The picture as seen does not hold on to the materiality of the canvas; the colours - as places - give the pictures a reason to open up.

Once again mountain-water painting (chin. *shān-shuǐ-huà* 山水画)

Qiu bases this kind of silent painting on his cultural heritage of mountain-water painting. From the 5th century onwards, however, this type of painting differs from European landscape painting, which was only recognized as a separate category from the 17th century. The special appreciation of mountain-water painting in China indeed testifies to the different understanding of landscape within the terminological difference to Western landscape painting. Whereas in European pictorial semantics, landscape is a perspective representation of a moment of view of a world in whose opposite its perceptual worlds unfold, Chinese mountain-water painting is

²⁵ Jullien, op. cit., p. 37.

²⁶ See next page, Editor's note.

²⁷ <http://www.art-in-berlin.de/incbmeldvideo.php?id=2415>.

based on the spirit of a special way of relating to the world.²⁸ It should be noted that mountain-water painting was originally seen in the form of scroll paintings and thus unrolled piece by piece in the horizontal. Thus, only parts of the whole could be recognized and in the temporality of the unrolling, the picture already had a narrative component.

"'Mountain-water' symbolizes dualities that span the world and the infinite exchanges that result from them."²⁹

Likewise, their approach to unrolling makes it subject to a time limit. The picture offers no point of capture or fixed position, either inside or outside the picture. Rather, the extensive landscape is changed by the manual unrolling of it, in that it can be experienced through a visual empathy. There is something narrative inherent in the picture. Qiu expressed this in his initial quotation. The scroll painting invites the viewer to wander through the landscape, to linger and pause at 'places',³⁰ in order to let the entirety have an effect on him, as is the case in a narrative. A "living in the picture" as a settling in, however, is denied him. This term, coined by the Chinese painter and painting theorist Guo Xi (郭熙 1023 - ca. 1085) in his work *Exalted Mood to Forest and Spring* {published posthumously by his son Guo Si (郭思)} has since then stimulated the discourse on the relationship between picture and viewer.³¹

"'Dwelling in the picture' consequently presupposes a way of seeing that opens itself decisively to the unfolding of multi-faceted pictorial experiences, rather than registering and exploring

28 . Jullien, op. cit., p. 150, 151.

29 Ibid.

30 These 'places' also behave like the 'in between', see footnote 23.

31 El. Obert, *Welt als Bild*, p. 347 – 359; Jullien, op. cit., p. 174 -188.

every detail individually."³² This means the corporeality through which the image is integrated is in the act of creation as a mood, i.e. to grasp its inner meaning, the heart spirit (chin. 心 *xīn*) as a state of mind and as the origin of all action.³³

"The mind is from the outset in an active relation to places in an environment and to life situations in which it is involved as a result of the corporeality of being human"³⁴

Thus, the mountain-water landscape picture demands from the viewer a view of the mood of the real world and not just an art-understanding, iconological view.

The picture does not represent; it refers to the mood of the self and its reality as a world, and thus stands out from mere signs that are denied. The viewer finds what is really real in the picture by staying in the 'place' of this world - momentarily mirrored in his own self. In the landscape picture, there is at no time a fixed picture within the picture.

"In it, a much broader view comes to light at this point, namely that the in being is inherent in this environment, which is determined by situation and orthography. In the picture, it is precisely a living, in Guo Xi's case a living in the mountains, that has to be made possible, which is as being in the picture up to a physical entering into this world. The observer should be able to choose with his whole person his stay at this place and in this environment."³⁵

An externally subjective view of the world cannot be embodied in it - 32 von Berswordt-Wallrabe, *Between presence and absence. Qiu Shihua's landscape painting*, p.16.

33 Obert, op. cit., p. 347.

34 Ibid.

35 Obert, op. cit., p. 345.

rather, a subjective panoramic image unfolds over this world. The subject moves in an immanence of the image that forms his existence, his being in. A location in the wholeness of the picture is therefore no longer bound to temporality, as already indicated in Qiu's opening quotation.

The world as such is precisely a pure counterpart in which man could disappear. The world is precisely dependent on an orthodox and temporal unfolding "in" the individual existence.³⁶ The action is also integrated into this. The act and the mood of the painter, who is himself immersed in the landscape, is inwardly united with it and immerses himself in its mood. Only in the mode of his self-forgetfulness is it possible for him to embody this world visually. The leitmotif here is the Taoist state of non-action (*wú-wéi* 無為), and other moods such as *zìrán* 自然 (of-self-so) and *lǐ* 理 (paths of reality) are also worth mentioning, but will not be discussed further here.

Not only do the sinologists Obert and Jullien point in this direction, but these thought movements are also found within the newer phenomenological research.

Hans Rainer Sepp also integrates living existence as the physical embodiment of the human being in a *There* into his thinking. The body as a mediating place stands as the first boundary of a place of existence, as the first spatiality (exteriority) in the *There* to experience the world. Being-*There* is being at the border to our person. The person (lat. *persōna*, the mask) is the image (of lat. imagination) of our self. In the *persona* (mask), the person sets up in his mask - between his self and the world of the imagination. "This imagination (lat. image, imagination) is his living space *oikos* which is constituted by means of language and symbols."³⁷

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ El. Sepp, *Die Utopie des Bildes*, p. 27.

Thus, the painter must also be prepared neither to depict simple real landscapes nor mere inner states of mind, but to allow a pictorial world to emerge within himself.

On the canvas there is no visualization of fixed forms (Greek *eidos*), but the phenomena of transformation, whereby the form cannot be separated from the process of its appearance. In the process of emergence and seeing the work of mountain-water-painting- [...] - a relaxed and concentrated attitude is required, which allows a coexistential engagement with the sensual, perceptible world. [...] "Images of the world" permeate our thinking,"³⁸ says Obert, referring to Martin Heidegger's famous quotation:

"The world has always been in some way a picture of itself, a proving "world view".³⁹

François Jullien speaks here of a particular disposition of the viewer:

"Dis-possibility means that the inner disposition towards each new "so" as it "blooms by itself" (*ziran*), remains open and fluid."⁴⁰

Thus we do not enter an objective world, but through our subjective existence, the world becomes aesthetically experienceable and real. Only then do we see it, as was shown in the example of Qiu's picture. Only after the eye has been in the picture for a required period of time does its landscape (mental attitude) become apparent, which again behaves coexistently with the observer.

Seeing is thus to be seen as an opening to the outside. The process of seeing resembles a partial absence of one's own state of mind, or as Maurice

³⁸ Obert, op.cit., p. 39 – 40.

³⁹ Heidegger, *Zeit des Weltbildes*, p. 86, in Obert, op.cit. 40.

⁴⁰ Jullien, op.cit., p. 195.

Merleau-Ponty describes it:

"Seeing is neither a particular mode of thought nor a self-presence; it is a means of being absent from myself, of witnessing from within the split of being through which I alone become myself."⁴¹

Being - Not-being: Visible - Non-visible: Place

Influences of the Chinese and Japanese arts were transported back to Europe via the New York School in the post-1945 period. This way of seeing/hearing now influenced artists in non-imaging painting in Europe and stimulated a new reflection on seeing and the formation of reality. The focus was on the possibilities within the limitation of materiality, especially the effect of colour,⁴² in its own interrelation and in the context of space, as well as the interactive relationship between image and viewer. The work *Abstract Painting #20* by Ad Reinhard is shown here as an example. I would like to confront Reinhard with Qiu in order to show the differential attitude despite the external similarity in the legibility of these pictures.

Reinhard, influenced by Zen Buddhism, addresses the interrelationship between the visible and the invisible in his paintings as well as in his art historical writings, and shows a clear proximity to Merleau Ponty's thinking.

"Both break away from a dualism that has long been binding for Western thinking and no longer understand visibility and invisibility as diametrically opposed. From a rational dualistic point of view, the visible belongs in the world of the tangible. [...] Mer-

leau-Ponty breaks away from this when he is interested in 'the invisible of this world, that which inhabits this world, supports it, makes it visible'⁴³

At first glance, this image also appears as a monochrome black surface, similar to Qiu's image, which is a whitish translucent surface. In their working process, both artists apply colour pigments to the canvas in layers, which, in the case of Qiu, are created by superimposing several layers of white glaze, and in Reinhard's case, by mixing colour pigments of the primary colours into black, in a slow, continuous process of becoming these pictures. Both artists work systematically over long periods of time on these series, which are marked by constant practical repetition and a slight differentiation of the formulation possibilities within the self-imposed framework of action. Of own work, Reinhard claims:

"Vision in art is not vision.
The visible in art is visible.
The invisible in art is invisible.
The invisibility of art is visible."⁴⁴

Seeing is involved in the processes of constant overlooking and not seeing. Thus, the picture behaves as a place (*topos*) where the phenomenon of pointing in a sense is presented in a new way in variable forms. If we approach the painting a little closer, the picture will disappear and our seeing suddenly perceives all the more the structures of the canvas and the application of paint.

Jean-Luc Nancy calls this place the 'ground of the image':

"The ground for the images is the

⁴³ Merleau-Ponty, *Das Sichtbare und das Unsichtbare*, p. 198

⁴⁴ Barbra Rose (ed.) *Art -as-Art. The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhard*, (New York, Viking Press, 1975) Berkley and Los Angeles, University of California Press 1991, p. 67; here quoted after Berswordt-Wallrabe, p. 24.

⁴¹ Merleau-Ponty, *Das Auge und der Geist*, p. 311.

⁴² like at Josef Albers, el. Beberswordt-Wallrabe, p. 20.

power of the image - it is also non-place. [...] The reason for the images is the power of the image - it is also non-place."⁴⁵

"The image is separated in two simultaneous ways when it acts as a detachment and at the same time release. In the detachment, the image distances itself from the ground and allows it to occur."⁴⁶

"The image phenomenon introduces itself, silently enters the border of the world of things and yet is not itself a thing. It preserves the distinctive and remains on the edge of the world of things as a world of disposition."⁴⁷

In relation to the image of Qiu, this pictoriality, which builds up slowly for a time and then disappears at the same moment, can be experienced as an ontology of being and not-being within the image situation. According to Hans Rainer Sepp, the picture functions as a place of ideas in the sense of a threefold utopia:

1. "it suggests as an un-place in the between self and world
2. on the floor of the un-place of an imagination of real reference
3. with the still outstanding and in this sense utopian goal of gaining stability, to transform it into a stable place."⁴⁸

This is especially true for the visual experience of the *White-Fields* of Qiu.⁴⁹

45 Nancy, *Am Grund der Bilder*, p. 20.

46 Ibid., p. 18.

47 Ibid., p. 11.

48 Sepp, *Die Utopie des Bildes*, p. 29.

49 El. further Jullien, p.40,41, p. 50,51, p. 63, pp. 66,67.

The constant change of the forms draws new world views again and again. In it, Qui Shihua's pictures behave as described in *Daode jing* § 41: "the big picture has no ultimate form". New forms open up to the viewer again and again, provided that he has the necessary time to stay, which these pictures initially demand of him.

If the language of space and spatiality is within Western painting, this means that the creation of a spatial illusion in the picture is to be understood. The viewer is thus assigned a perspective for viewing, which is usually outside the picture. This state of affairs is particularly well understood in the landscape painting of Joseph Anton Koch (1768 - 1839) or Claude Lorrain (1600-1682), both of whom emphasise the aspect of sublimity according to Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant.⁵⁰

At this point, I would like to take up Robert Rauschenberg's White Paintings in order to emphasize the different statement regarding the spatiality of Qui's work. Rauschenberg's prominent series White Painting negates any inner-pictorial difference and thus marks images of a zero-denotation.⁵¹ This confrontation with the mere factuality of a monochrome, unframed, square white surface does not offer the viewer's eye any length

of stay. Rather, attention is paid to the surrounding space by consciously including light, the reflection of color, the "volume of the exhibition space" and the respective light and shadow conditions in the field of perception through the composition of the picture.

"Since it thereby becomes clear that the painting we are examining is subject to the very same influences as we are, the situation existing at any given moment in time assumes particular importance as the point where many different influences converge."⁵²

While Rauschenberg refers to a transcendental environment, we experience an inner-pictorial spatio-temporal illusion in Qiu's *White Fields*. Both spaces, however, elude visual and conceptual expression by creating a diffused atmosphere that presses on our self. In James Turrell's light installations, these spaces can be experienced in a very extreme way, in which the physical boundaries of space are removed and the physical body is initiated into an experience of placelessness, a state of suspension by being completely thrown back on sensual perception.

Conclusion

In the juxtaposition of the listed paintings by Qiu, Reinhard and Rauschenberg, Odo Marquard's⁵³ question is finally raised in the room:

"How much of a picture may one eliminate without its ceasing to be a picture?"⁵⁴

50 El. Burke, Edmund, *A philosophical enquiry into the origin of our ideas of the sublime and beautiful* (Philosophische Untersuchung über den Ursprung unserer Ideen vom Erhabenen und Schönen), 1757; and: Kant, Immanuel, *Criticism of judgment* (Kritik der Urteilskraft), 1790.

51 This concept goes back to Nelson Goodman, cf.: Goodman, Nelson, *Sprachen der Kunst*, p. 31. Charles William Morris already presupposed this 'zero denotation' in his theory of signs: "Since a rule of use says what a sign can denote, but since the sign does not have to be used in such a way that it denotes, there can be signs that denote nothing, signs that have zero denotations" Morris, C. W., *Grundlagen der Zeichentheorie, Ästhetik der Zeichentheorie*, translated by Roland Posner with the collaboration of Jochen Rehbein, Frankfurt/Main, Fischer Verlag, 1988, p. 47.

52 Von Berswordt-Wallrabe, op.cit., p. 28.

53 German Philosopher, born 1928 Słupsk, Poland, died 2015 in Celle.

54 Odo Marquard, Hans Blumenberg. *Entlastung vom Absoluten*, „Du“, no. 11/1991, p.25; Quoted after von Berswordt-Wallrabe, op. cit., p.34.

Qiu's positioning in his increasing omission of colour and form contains a negation of pictoriality and yet, precisely for this reason, highlights the spaces in which the visibility of the picture as a place can be experienced in a differentiated way.

A "living in the picture" is consciously denied to the viewer, in order not to allow him or her to be in the world with the reliability of his or her own seeing and thus to be set up in the world. Indeterminacy takes the place of material factuality in order to effectively show meaning in the process of perception. In contrast to a mimetic visual language, the East Asian arts are based on emptiness in order to find the whole "world" in it.

In Qiu's examination of landscape, a localization of the world is essentially revealed, which already has its basis in the contemplating self. A constant dialectical world rising and falling results in connections that diagnose a crisis-like relationship to the lived environment. Qiu's pictures suggest imaginary spaces that do not offer the viewer a place of refuge or recreation (*oikos*), but rather shake him by excluding stability within the world reference. They are a bland, visible-non-visible, immanent structure of coexistences.

Ad Reinhard and Rauschenberg, on the other hand, fall back on Western visual conventions by reducing formal imagery to a minimum and thus offering what is externally effective within the situation as experience. They are representatives of an "aesthetics of absence"⁵⁵ and react to the stimulus

satiation and increasing rationalisation. However, if Qiu's pictures remain an inexhaustible source of temporary illusions, Reinhard and Rauschenberg only achieve their effect via the context to the imaginary surrounding space.

The foggy, diffuse, insipid blurriness in Qiu's paintings can be read as an essential quality of these.

"As Plato describes in his *Politeia* (510a), there are not only images in the world, but there is a world of images that is located on the threshold of dreams and waking, of day and night, in the twilight of the "nocturnal day" (521c), which Plato's spreading enlightenment, those *lumières* of reason, persistently resists. Images mean that it will never be all day."⁵⁶

If pictures silently oppose a clear conceptual logic and offer a pure rational alienation, this is largely true of Qiu Shihua's painting. He thus presents a challenge to encounter seeing in a new way in an intercultural scientific discourse.

The reduction of the warning to visibility was taken up in the Western art world, particularly from the 1960s onwards, through its influence from Asia. If this emptiness is offered as a place, it is precisely by its refusal to be pictorially represented that it harbours a potential that forces the viewer into a new role.

which an aesthetic of absence is discernible - especially since 1945 (Fontana, Manzoni, Klein, Cage and others already mentioned) - as well as the tendency to dematerialise the artistic object and other strategies of immateriality that dominate both art and theory in the 1960s and 1970s (as Frank Popper analyzes in 1975 in his book "Le déclin de l'objet", which also points to the process of dematerialisation and dissolution of the art object). If we look at the changes driven by technology, these experiences become even more apparent.

56 Ibid., p. 14, quoted after von Berswordt-Wallrabe, p. 36.

55 El. Waldenfels, *Spiegel, Spur und Blick. Zur Genese des Bildes*, p.14, here quoted after von Berswordt-Wallrabe, p. 39. Paul Virilio and Peter Weibel describe this process of dematerialisation as an 'era of absence', which produces an aesthetic based on the *absum*, in its meaning of distance and spatial distance, as well as lack, loss and dematerialisation. Media art takes up the experiences of the first artistic signs in



Robert Rauschenberg, *White Painting*, House paint on canvas, 182.9 x 320 cm, 1951, Robert



Rauschenberg Foundation

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