

The Cultural Lineage in the Field of Chinese Art Manifesting on Dong Qichang's Work,

Theory and Value

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Abstract

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As an often-debated topic in literature and history, the power of cultural lineage in some ways also manifests itself in the field of art. The study of the cultural lineage traces the origin of the Chinese literati spirit and its inheritance. In order to find out the connections between Dong Qichang and the “old masters” as becoming ideal figure of Chinese literati group, this article will analyze critical terms and concepts of Dong that adopted from his admired “old masters” – concepts like shiqi 士氣, xiongci 胸次, pingdan tianzhen 平淡天真, etc. The study will involve how Dong received and developed his ideas following great masters, why Dong's theory stands out and becomes one of the dominant disciplines of Chinese art, and how would this inheritance process improve scholars' understanding of the lineage between Chinese masters in different time periods.

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Introduction

Chinese literati painting, also known as “ink and wash painting”, is one of the two main techniques in Chinese painting.¹ Landscape painting – an important part of literati painting – was regarded as the highest form of Chinese painting.² Dong Qichang (1555-1636), an influential scholar-officials in the Ming dynasty, represents the cultural discipline of landscape painting in Chinese art and literati history.³ Dong was one of those rare scholar-officials who was successful in both politics and culture. During his lifetime, he reached the position of Minister of Rites of Nanjing. Outside of politics, he was renowned as peaceful, amiable and easily approached, versed in Buddhism and elegant in conversation.⁴ Dong also left a strong mark in the history of Chinese art and literature. Both in his time and in

¹ The other main technique in Chinese painting is called *gongbi* 工筆 or “meticulous brushwork”. Chinese literati painting is also referred as *shuimo* 水墨 or “water and ink” or *xieyi* 寫意 or “impression-expressing”. It is sometimes also loosely rendered as “freehand style,” “watercolor” or “brush painting”. For more discussion on the classification of Chinese painting, see Rawson, *The British Museum Book of Chinese Art*, 114-19.

² Rawson, 112.

³ Dong Qichang, 1555 – 1636, 董其昌, courtesy name Xuanzai 玄宰, pseudonym Sibai 思白, alias Xiangguang hermit 香光居士, a native of *Huating* 华亭, is a well-studied figure by scholars like James Cahill, Susan Bush, Fang Wen, Edmund Capon, Mae Anna Pang, Lawrence Gowing, Chen Ci, etc.

⁴ Cited in *Ming Shi* 明史, 7396. The Ministry or Board of Rites 禮部尚書 was one of the Six Ministries of government in late imperial China. Along with religious rituals and court ceremonies, the Ministry of Rites oversaw the imperial examination and China’s foreign relations, giving it great power. Hucker discusses more about this position and the all the Chinese ranking system in his book *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*, 306–07.

later generations, people recognized him as a prominent calligrapher and painter, and often compared him to giants in Chinese Art History such as Mi Fu 米芾 (1051–1107) and Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫 (1254–1322). His works were described in such terms as “[Even] A strip of Dong’s paper, people sought after like treasure” 片楮單牘，人爭寶之; His painting and theory of painting served as a guiding force in literati painting for nearly 300 years.⁵

In the following centuries, people continued to praise Dong’s artistry. The Kangxi Emperor (r. 1661-1722) lauded the unusual talents of Dong’s brushwork. He described it as extremely mellow and full, flowing among the paper and ink in ways others could not accomplish that. It contained unique appearance and spirit in unintentional manners, resembling the gathering and spreading of light clouds or the gentle breeze, all in special with the natural interests.⁶

Modern scholars continue to applaud Dong’s contributions to Chinese art. In 梅景書屋隨筆, Wu Hufan mentioned that Dong Qichang’s work had acquired a uniqueness in imitation

⁵ *Yuding peiwenzhai shuhuapu* 御定佩文齋書畫譜, edited by Sun Yueban 孫岳頌 (1639-1708). In *Siku quanshu*, volume 822, 0483a, 1987.

⁶ Kangxi Emperor, “Writing behind Dong’s Ink Work” 跋董其昌墨迹後 in *Yuding peiwenzhai shuhuapu* 御定佩文齋書畫譜, volume 822, 0008b, 1987. “華亭董其昌書法，天資迥異。其高秀圓潤之致，流行與楮墨間，非諸家所能及也。每與若不經意處，豐神獨絕，如微雲卷舒，清風飄拂，天然之趣。” Dong Qichang is from Huating, Songjiang (now Shanghai); in ancient China, people sometimes use one’s hometown to refer this certain person.

which could not be found in others.⁷ Fu Baoshi remarked that art in the Ming had suffered a decline due to the decadence of Ming Academy and Zhe School.⁸ It was Dong who raised a call to reverse that decline. He was the backbone of the art school, the only master with excellent knowledge and refined states, appealing to add the principle of Chan Buddhism in paints. The themes of traditional Chinese painting changed from Song’s “rational” to Yuan’s “will” and then to the “loyalty” of Ming. Fu saw Dong’s paintings not only as solemn images of nationalism, but also as following the natural development of “landscape”, “freehand brushwork” and “water-ink style” paintings, revealing a light not seen before.⁹

Some scholars have not confined themselves to the study of the style of Dong’s painting and calligraphy, as they have turned to the role Dong had played in his time and the overall culture. Fang Wen – the leading authority on Chinese art in North America – once noted that people believe that the Renaissance of every era is derived from a wise founder; his

⁷ Wu Hufan 吳湖帆, (1894-1968), *Zhongguo Meishu Xueyuan Meishushi Yanjiusuo Congshu* 中國美術學院美術史研究所叢, 172.

⁸ Ming Academy and Zhe School refers to 明代院體與浙派. Ming Academy is originated from Song Academy; Zhe School gets its name since its founder Dai Jin 戴進 (1388—1462) is from Qiantang (now Hangzhou) in Zhejiang. Both of them were important painting school in the Chinese painting circle in the early and middle period of the Ming Dynasty. Particular predominant in the more than 100 years before the Ming Jiajing period (mid 14th century). The paintings of these two school were characterized as realistic landscape painting.

⁹ Fu Baoshi 傅抱石, (1904 -1965), *Zhongguo Huihua Bianqian Shigang* 中國繪畫變遷史綱, 71.

ability and insight would foster peace and prosperity during this period. However, this development always inevitably leads to corruption and eventually heads towards decline. To reverse the tide, there needs to be innovators who can recover the moral and spiritual through a return to the classics.¹⁰

Dong Qichang was a prominent member of the literati, the political and social elite of late imperial China. Therefore, studying him can further research on this important group. While there is considerable scholarship on Dong's life, artistic talent, relationships, and his famous theory of the Northern and Southern Schools, there is little analysis of his written works on art.¹¹ The closely study of his art texts, however, would shed light on both him and the literati group. In his magnum opus *Lidai ming huaji* 歷代名畫記 (*Some T'ang and Pre-T'ang Texts on Painting*), Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠 (815 - 907), one of the earliest historians of Chinese art, began with the pronouncement that, "As for painting, it perfects the civilizing teachings and maintains social relationships."¹² With this statement, Zhang

¹⁰ Fang Wen, *Dong Qichang and the revitalization of art*, 2

¹¹ The Northern and Southern Schools refers to the two different styles of Chinese painters and professional painters systematically raised by Dong Qichang in his *Huachanshi suibi* (page 452) in the history of Chinese painting. Dong divided the development of paintings from the Tang to Yuan dynasties into two groups according to the identity, painting method and style of the painter. He deprecated the Northern School that he believed began with Li Sixun 李思訓 (651 - 716) and his sons' polychromatic landscape paintings, and highly praised the Southern School that began with Wang Wei's 王維 (699 - 795) monochromatic *xieyi* landscapes. An abundance of studies on Dong's Northern and Southern Schools can be seen in the book collection *Dong Qichang Yanjiu Wenji*. Shanghai: Shanghai painting and calligraphy press, 1998.

¹² *Lidai minghuaji* 歷代名畫記, Zhang Yanyuan, in *Siku quanshu*, 812-279. "夫畫者成

emphasized the relationship between painting, civilized education and social practice, pointing out that the study of art could deepen enlightenment and human relationship.

Similarly, the modern scholar Tu Weiming has promoted the role textual analysis could serve in understanding aesthetic meaning. He has discussed the study of art theory texts in relation to Chinese philosophy or other prominent ideas. He provides an orientation or a method of analysis that would “focus on some of the insights found in a text which is central to ethics and hitherto ignored in aesthetics”.¹³ In other words, when studying a person or a group of person, it is worthwhile to use their artworks and texts on art theory to study their mental status and values.

Apart from the iconic role Dong’s life has played, there are persistent questions among scholars of how Dong received and developed his ideas about art and the practice of following great masters: Why does Dong’s theory stand out among Chinese art theories? How was he able to reflect successfully the ideas of the “old masters”, transforming them into a discipline of Chinese art? How would understanding this inheritance process improve scholars’ knowledge of the lineage between Chinese masters across different time periods?

教化，助人倫。” The translation of the title is based on Acker, William’s 1954 translation of the book.

¹³ Du Weiming, 杜維明, (1940 - present), “The idea of human in Mencian thoughts: An Approach to Chinese Aesthetics” is the article included in the book *Theories of the Arts in China* edited by Bush, Susan, Murck, Christian F, and American Council of Learned Societies. Committee on Studies of Chinese Civilization published by Princeton University Press in 1983, 58.

This article deals with these questions by analyzing critical terms and concepts Dong shared with the masters after whom he modeled his art. Instead of discussing art skills, genres or divisions of art schools, this article focuses on Dong and the “old masters” through their similar preferences and modes of thought established through the accepted process of self-cultivation to become an ideal figure of literati. With the help of these analyses, the article strives to find out how Dong and the masters understand and use these concepts in their literature, art, and lives. Furthermore, studying these critical terms and concepts illustrates the similarities between Dong and the people he imitates; it also reveals the shared intellectual and philosophical tradition of the literati painters of which Dong was a member. Using art texts to understand the literati painters can also shape our understanding of the broader literati group, as this was one medium they used to communicate and connect through lineage.

Since this article relies on an analysis of the texts expounding Dong’s art theories, the choice of the text is vitally important. There is no a comprehensive collection of Dong’s writings, it is necessary to make some clarifications about the text chosen. There are four corpuses that are attributed to Dong Qichang – *Huachanshi suibi*, *Hua zhi*, *Hua yan*, and *Rongtai ji*. There are numerous versions of these texts edited by succeeding generations.¹⁴ There are several widely used versions of *Huachanshi suibi*. There is the version edited by

¹⁴ *Huachanshi suibi* 畫禪室隨筆, *Hua zhi* 畫旨, *Hua Yan* 畫眼, *Rongtai Ji* 容臺集.

the publishing house Saoye shan fang 掃葉山房 during the Republican period in the early twentieth century, the version collected in the *Suku quanshu* 四庫全書 compiled at the command of the Qianlong Emperor (r. 1735-1796) in the eighteenth century and reprinted in 1987 and another edition annotated by Tu Youxiang in 2011. A commonly used version of the *Hua zhi* was annotated by Mao Jianbo in 2008.

The first three works are collections of Dong's writings collected by later scholars. Many of the received items in these three corpuses overlapped with each other, but none of them have all his extant writings. Among them, *Hua zhi* has collected the most articles, approximately one hundred and sixty, followed by the *Huachanshi suibi* with around one hundred and thirty, while the *Hua yan* collected less than one hundred. To remedy this, Yu Anlan supplemented his edit of the *Huazhi* with texts from the other collections, totaling two hundred and ten essays.¹⁵ Yu's version therefore saves researchers the trouble of looking through each volume with its repeated contents. The *Rongtai ji* consists of ten volumes of "collected essays" (*wenji* 文集), four volumes of "collected poems" (*shiji* 詩集), and five volumes of "collected miscellany" (*bieji* 別集). Dong's works related to calligraphy and painting are collected in the *bieji*; the whole volume of *Rongtai ji* is collected in 1968 Taiwan reprinting of the Chongzhen 崇禎 (r. 1627 - 1644) edition.¹⁶

¹⁵ Yu Anlan, 於安瀾, (1902 -1999), the Chinese famous calligrapher and specialized in Chinese art history. *Hualun Congkan* 畫論叢刊, Beijing: Zhonghua Yinshuju, 1937.

¹⁶ Dong Qichang 董其昌. *Rongtai ji* 容臺集, 1630, facsm. repr. 1968, Taipei, juan 4.

This paper will draw from the *Huachanshi suibi* in the *Suku quanshu* version that was published by the Shanghai guji chubanshe in 1987 and *Rongtai ji* from 1968 Taiwan reprint. I will use Yu's version as a supplement. This article will directly refer the *Huachanshi Suibi* in the *Suku Quanshu* as the *Huachanshi Suibi* plus the page number; when citing the *Hua zhi*, I am referring to the *Huazhi* essay in volume 6 in *juan* 4 of 1968 Taiwan version *Rongtai ji*. For other citations, some of them are based on the help of The Chinese Text Project (中國哲學書電子化計劃). It is an online open-access digital library. It assembles over thirty thousand titles and more than five billion characters of early Chinese texts, especially Chinese philosophy texts.¹⁷

At last, about the spelling conventions and nomenclature of this article, pinyin romanization is the default system for the spelling of Chinese names and terms in this article, but some of the authors this paper quotes use Wade-Giles. They write Tung Ch'i-ch'ang rather than Dong Qichang, T'ang rather than Tang, etc. In quotations and bibliography, this article will of course follow the spelling of their choice; but otherwise this article will use pinyin.

¹⁷ The Chinese Text Project is credited with providing one of the most comprehensive and accurate collections of classical Chinese texts on the Internet, making use of the digital medium to explore new ways of interacting with texts that are not possible in print, as well as being one of the most useful textual databases for scholars of early Chinese texts. Further detailed of the site can be seen from its homepage: <https://ctext.org/>.

Literature Review

Scholars have conducted excellent studies of Dong Qichang from different perspectives. Apart from Chinese critics of past dynasties, both contemporary eastern and western scholars have made great efforts to explore this figure. For a general introduction of his life and experience, the Chinese scholar Chen Ci has finished a book on Dong Qichang. In the book, Chen not only focuses on stories of Dong but also provides comments from both modern scholars and scholars from imperial China, making the book a steppingstone to Dong studies.¹⁸ There is scholar like Lawrence Gowing that include Dong in her encyclopedic on art history.¹⁹ Edmund Capon and Mae Anna Pang were pioneers of studies on Dong's theories which combined a veneration of past masters with a creative, forward-looking spark that had a great impact on Qing Dynasty artists.²⁰ Ren Daobin has carefully collected a chronology of literary and historical information on Dong.²¹

In addition to discussions of Dong's life, work and relationships, some scholars have

¹⁸ Chen Ci, *Zhongguo minghua jia quanji – Dong Qichang*.

¹⁹ Lawrence Gowing, ed., *Biographical Encyclopedia of Artists*. New York: Facts on File, 2005, v.4, 682-3.

²⁰ Capon and Pang, *Chinese Paintings of the Ming and Qing Dynasties Catalogue*, 1981; Pang also offers several insightful articles about analyzing Dong, such as her discussions on Dong's influence in her 1976 Ph. D thesis *Wang Yüan-ch'i (1642-1715) and formal construction in Chinese landscape painting*, her analyses on Dong in articles "Late Ming Painting Theory" and "The Sung-chiang (Hua-t'ing) Painters, II: Tung Ch'i-ch'ang and his circle" collected in book *The Restless Landscape: Chinese Painting of the Late Ming Period*, edited by James Cahill and the University Art Museum of the University of California, Berkeley.

²¹ Ren Daobin, *Dong Qichang Xi Nian*.

taken a further step to explore more deeply the meaning of his brushwork and art theory.

The study of his “great synthesis” is the most common area of research. Craig Clunas, in his book on Wen Zhengming(1470-1559), cites Wen as an example of the normative models Dong Qichang used in his critical writings and as one of the “old masters” of Dong’s “great synthesis”. Clunas regards this transaction in the artworks of Wen and Dong as one of the “elegant debts” owed to Wen.²²

Among these numerous studies, James Cahill’s research on Dong could be regarded as one of the most detailed and authoritative. Cahill’s works cover many aspects of the study of Dong. Apart from his general discussion of Dong’s life, Cahill attempts to examine Dong through several angles. He explores one of the core concepts Dong has emphasized – that Dong’s memory of old paintings heavily influenced his perception of nature.²³ He further states that it is on the basis of Dong’s own works and his interaction of old paintings that scholars can deal with Dong’s real commitment to the project of portraying scenes of nature and his deepest engagement filled with formal and artistic concerns.²⁴ Cahill remarks that Dong was keenly aware of the expressive value and cultural associations of the forms he created or adopted.²⁵

²² Craig Clunas, *Elegant debts: the social art of Wen Zhengming, 1470-1559*, 172-79.

²³ James Cahill, *The compelling image: nature and style in seventeenth-century Chinese painting*, 44.

²⁴ *The compelling image*, 53.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 68.

Cahill analyzes three aspects of Dong's adherence to old models that are pertinent to this study. The first aspect is lineage. Cahill believes the lineage Dong composed drew on the attempts of artists and others in the early Ming period to list the lineages of the great masters of the past.²⁶ He argues that Dong is familiar with earlier theories such as Zhan Jingfeng's 詹景鳳 (1532-1602) "Two lineages" that classified master painters as "liberated masters" and the "fabricators", producing a system in which the lineages were clearly drawn. Based on Zhan's list, Dong provided an "even more vague and accommodating categories".²⁷ One of his lineages is led by Li Sixun and is characterized with polychromatic landscape paintings. The artists of this lineage reached their maturity through a process of cumulating their mastery of techniques. It is different from the lineage of literati (or cultivated men) whose achievements are characterized with spontaneous personal cultivation and aesthetic sensibilities. Dong in particular traces the lineage of the latter, which he associated with and opposes it to the other lineage.²⁸

The second aspect is about what Cahill calls the "great synthesis". He maintains that Dong painted with a deep sense of his position in history, as though he were being judged by the "old masters". Dong saw them as his chief rivals rather than one of the artists in his own

²⁶ James Cahill, *The Distant Mountain -- Chinese Painting of the Late Ming Dynasty, 1570-1644*, 9-10.

²⁷ *The distant mountain*, 12.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 13-4.

time.²⁹ Masters like Zhao Mengfu and Wen Zhenming were the very ones whom Dong regarded as his principal rivals in the past and the ones who he himself hoped to be.³⁰

The last and probably the most crucial aspect is the concept of *fang* 仿 or “imitation”. Cahill pays great attention to discuss this idea. He defines *fang* as a “free imitation” of the styles of some “old masters” and their works; in this process, a “spiritual correspondence” or “spiritual communication” with the masters was more important than a simple resemblance.³¹ Cahill believes this concept justifies the considerable scholarship on Dong, arguing that the concept of *fang* opened the way to original achievement and gave Dong a kind of historical sanction from the “old masters”. It was this concept which enabled Dong to carry out a revolution in the guise of a revival.³² It is wise to use the Chinese character *fang* to represent Dong’s practice, since the word imitation cannot fully explain the meaning of Dong’s action which includes both imitation and renovation.

Based on his analysis, Cahill concludes that Dong’s painting was not simply a pastiche of old paintings but a borrowed form that employed in a fundamentally new structure.³³

²⁹ *The compelling image*, 54.

³⁰ *The distant mountain*, 118.

³¹ *Ibid*, 123.

³² *Ibid*, 126.

³³ *Ibid*, 44.

Dong's real relationship to the past is the systematic process he uses to comprehend the whole history of painting.³⁴ Cahill has offered an image of Dong as both the carrier of and successor to the literati and the artistic heritage of that group. Cahill's analysis on Dong's adoption of past models goes far in uncovering the reasons for Dong's achievements and the approaches that led to his success. However, his arguments and evidence are largely based on understanding and comparing art skills, styles, school genres or regional divisions.

Shifting from purely emphasizing art skills, Susan Bush's study sheds light on literati culture by providing further evidence of the connection between art theory and literary practices. Bush discusses the concept of lineage by carefully analyzing the art theories of literati painters. In her book *The Chinese Literati on Painting Su Shih (1037-1101) to Tung Ch'i-Ch'ang (1555-1636)*, Bush focuses on the literati elements in painting theory rather than the common topics of many studies, such as politics, collections, art skills, factionalism among schools of art, and distinguish calligraphy. By following Cahill and Teng Gu's definitions and the gradual awareness of an artistic identity among scholar-painters, Bush regards literati painting as an example of a practice of a social class evolving into a stylistic tradition.³⁵

Bush pays great attention to the ideas of people like Su Shi and Dong Qichang and

³⁴ *The compelling image*, 65.

³⁵ Bush, Susan. *The Chinese Literati on Painting: Su Shih (1037-1101) to Tung Ch'i-ch'ang (1555-1636)*, 1971, 3. Teng Gu

compares them as the leading representatives of their respective time periods. Su Shi implies that scholars' paintings are best defined through the presence of a "scholarly spirit", rather than a matter of style. Bush believes that Su's phrase, *shiren hua* 士人畫, may be a forerunner of Dong Qichang's *wenren shihua* 文人士畫, the painting of the literati.³⁶ These two are connected in the way that Su's definition of literati painting does not apply to a specific artistic style but to the general character of the work. Similarly, Bush sees Dong's term *wenren shihua* as the Ming equivalent of Su Shih's "scholar's painting", developed at a time when the idea that painting was more a matter of style than of representation was dominant.³⁷

By following a chronological order, Bush tries to understand the context of literati development – namely, how art is related to literati over time. She mentions that scholars began to try to fit painting into a literary mold in the eleventh century, seeing qualities in work of art that were previously only valued in literature.³⁸ By taking "scholarly spirit" as a criterion of judgment and assessing a work in relation to its maker's life, Bush argues, contrary to general western views, that "even though they believe that a work of art should be judged on its own terms, the name of the painter and his place in art history can affect their overall view of it."³⁹ Tracing the lingering influence of Dong Qichang on Chinese art

³⁶ Bush, Susan. *The Chinese Literati on Painting*, 29.

³⁷ *The Chinese Literati on Painting*, 29, 32.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 12.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 182.

criticism, Bush believes that Dong's theory must be taken into account in modern histories of Chinese painting.⁴⁰ When discussing specific ideas such as *qiyun*, she argues that some concepts are central to the scholars' view of art and consequently must be studied in detail. Bush's study illustrates the influence of literary theory on writings about art.⁴¹

Through her study of the individual literati painters, Bush presents a theory of the literati painters as an important part of educated elite. She then highly praised the literati painters as the key group that shaped the patterns of Chinese arts whose ideas became the underlying assumptions of later writers, and whose culture forms the backbone of Chinese painting and its theory.⁴²

Cahill's argument built on the belief that the artist's thought or feeling should be expressed (in an acceptable way) through the brushwork and forms of the painting itself and not through the subject represented. Bush stressed the importance of studying the indirect products of artist to further understand their artwork as well as group to which they belonged. This paper follows Cahill and Bush's path as it analyzes the literati spirit Dong inherited from his practice and represented in his art theory. The original sources used here are more about literary work and theory rather than artwork for the comparison and analysis of these Chinese literati study.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 180.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 13.

⁴² *Ibid*, 185.

Texts and Theories of Dong Qichang

The first of the “old masters” of Dong’s *fang* was Wang Wei 王維 (699 - 759) as he wrote: “Literati painting began with vice councilor Wang” 文人之畫，自王右丞始。⁴³ Scholars had praised Wang’s artistry for centuries. In his late Tang work *Some T’ang and Pre-T’ang Texts on Painting*, Zhang Yanyuan acclaimed Wang Wei’s “splashed-ink landscape” (*pomo shanshui* 潑墨山水), which he produced by splashing clear ink in order to create a “rendering light” (*xuan dan* 渲淡) effect. This gave the landscape a clear and soft character, which is also a characteristic of the word *wen* 文 – the ultimate ideal of the literati class in the sense of being moderate and measured.

The concept of *wen* can be broadly interpreted as culturally refined characteristics, but scholars offer a number of different meanings. It could be one of the most important Chinese cultural patterns, a ritualized social condition of the educated elites.⁴⁴ In another sense, it could be the first character of the term “literati painting” (*wenren hua* 文人畫). It maintains the cultural textual traditions of the literati education, which is in contrast with the

⁴³ Wang Wei – the famous Tang poet and statesman, also known for his paintings – is sometimes named as Wang Youcheng 王右丞 after his former official position; the meaning of 右丞 see Hucker’s book “A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China”, 584. The argument is from *Huachanshi suibi* 畫禪室隨筆, 452.

⁴⁴ The meaning of *wen* changed overtime, as Kern Martin identifies in his article on the uses of *wen* in the Han dynasty by analyzing *wen* in different words (see Martin, “Ritual, Text, and the Formation of the Canon: Historical Transitions of ‘Wen’ in Early China”, 43.) Kern believes that the meaning of *wen* changes with the times, arguing that it should be treated as a historical phenomenon and regarded as different words and patterns depending on how it is used.

humbler background of professional painters. In another sense, *wen* could be the obverse of the word *wu* 武.⁴⁵ The imperial Chinese bureaucracy consisted of two distinct groups. One group rose in the ranks through military merit, represented by *wu*, while the other achieved distinction through the path of self-cultivation, represented by *wen*.⁴⁶ In both of these senses of the word *wen*, Dong very likely admired Wang, and he used those qualities to emphasize the superiority and orthodoxy of the literati behaviors. Dong Qichang praised the ability of “old masters” like Wang Wei to use their art and theory in order to convey his own emotions.

⁴⁵ *Wu* 武 is usually translated as “martial”; as it is always treated as an antithesis to *wen*, the comparison between them as pairs helps illustrate the meaning of *wen*.

⁴⁶ The conception, the relationship and the opposition of the Chinese idea of *wen* and *wu* is comprehensively discussed in Louie Kam and Edwards Louise’s “Chinese Masculinity: Theorizing ‘Wen’ and ‘Wu’”, 135-48.

以蹊徑之怪奇論，則畫不如山水；

以筆墨之精妙論，則山水決不如畫。⁴⁷

When depicting the wonder of a stream and path, the painting is not as good as the actual mountains and waters;

When discussing the subtlety of brushstroke and ink, the actual mountains and waters are not as good as the painting.

This praise emphasizes the expression of the literati temperament through brushstrokes and ink. While nature possesses its endless uniqueness, the landscape painting – infused with literati painter’s emotion – is more evocative. When he retired from the public life and became a hermit to be aloof from factional strife at court, Wang amused himself with water and ink, and this practice reflected a common idea of the literati, following Mencius’ characterization of a cultivated individual: “In adversity (*qiong*), they turned to their own attainment in solitude; in prosperity and prominence (*da*), they turned to deliver the world” 窮則獨善其身，達則兼善天下。⁴⁸ Mencius employs *qiong* and *da* in the same way as the

⁴⁷ *Huachanshi suibi* 畫禪室隨筆, Dong Qichang, 474. Regarding versions of the *Huachanshi suibi*, there are different records of this part: in the *Rongtai ji*, it is “以徑之奇怪論”, 2097; in Yu Anlan’s edit this part is “以境之奇怪論，則畫不如山水”. In this case, the translation should be: “In terms of marvelous wonder of realms, the painting is not as good as the actual mountains and waters.” This paper chooses *Siku quanshu*’s version.

⁴⁸ “Exhausting the Mind I” Jin Xin I 盡心上, Mengcius 孟子, Chinese Text Project, <https://ctext.org/>, Article 9. This idea is related to the concept of *tianxia jiaguo* 天下家國. It is one of the basic models of Confucian relational ethics that persistently carried out by

phrase “failure and success according to the times” (*qionghdayishi* 窮達以世). The idea presented in the text was that the holders of *qionghda* aspirations both possessed self-cultivation of their characters and modeled themselves in response to the wayward times.⁴⁹ Although later scholars insisted on that being “poor” or “exhausted” was not necessarily the actual situation that literati faced when they talked of facing adversity, the detached notion that “in advancement or withdrawal, one is equally poised; in success or dire straits, one has that which he abides by” 從容進退, 窮達有守 become an inalienable part of the literati spirit. Dong himself retreated from officialdom several times, he yearned for the delight of nature, and he expressed a desire for seclusion and pursuing freedom on his own as a normal literati scholar. In these ways, he shared similar attitudes as his spiritual idol Wang Wei. When politics ties his hands, the back and forth of retreating and advancing in his career enabled Dong to feel self-satisfied as light as a leaf with joy. This kind of easiness and calm was inherited from his self-awareness as a literati scholar, from the appreciation of quintessence in Wang’s works and from his attitude towards and interests in brushstrokes and ink.

Chinese literati scholars: “There is a common expression, ‘The Empire, the state, the family’. The Empire has its basis in the state, the state in the family, and the family in one’s own self.” This idea was attributed to the concept “cultivated oneself (修身), harmonized one’s own clan (齊家), governed well one’s own states (治國), manifested their bright virtue to all in the world (平天下)” that was first mentioned in the *Great Learning* 大學 which was one of the “Four Books” in Confucianism. From this perspective, a person is not an isolated individual but rather is constituted by a network of human relations. In this sense, the self-cultivation (xiushen 修身) becomes an extension and enhancement of this relational network and gradually turns to be an important part of their truth pursuing. See Sor-Hoon Tan, “Between family and state relational tensions in Confucian ethics”.

⁴⁹ Behuniak, James. *Mencius on Becoming Human*. 102-03.

II

士人作畫，當以草隸奇字之法為之。

樹如屈鐵，山似畫沙，絕去甜俗蹊徑，乃為士氣。⁵⁰

The literati painting should be accomplished with calligraphic skill, with the tree like bent iron, the mountain as picturesque sand – departing from the vast paths of the sweet and the vulgar; this could be therefore taken as the collective vitality of the literati.

In addition to his idolization of Wang Wei, Dong Qichang embraced the thinking of Dong Yuan 董源 (fl. ca. 930-75), whose works he sought to collect throughout his life. He obtained four pieces in total: the *Xiaoxiang tu* 瀟湘圖, *Longsu jiaomin tu* 龍宿郊民圖, *Qiujiang xinglü tu* 秋江行旅圖 and half of *Xishan xinglü tu* 溪山行旅圖. Dong regarded Dong Yuan and his pupil Ju Ran 巨然 (active ca. 960-80) as the two real leaders of the literati lineage he belonged to. One of the reasons that Dong was so addicted to Dong Yuan's paintings was the consistent and unique charm of the literati spirit those paintings embodied. Dong's enthusiasm for this concept is mainly reflected through his own artwork, as he copied numerous paintings by Dong Yuan and Ju Ran, such as the *Qiushan tu* 秋山圖. His brushstrokes resembled to Dong and Ju's *pimacun* 披麻皴, which showed faintly visible light and moist ink strokes, with looming lines appearing like an unintentional product of the painting.⁵¹ There was no deliberate description. This was what Dong Qichang declared:

⁵⁰ *Huachanshi suibi*, 446. In *Hua Zhi*, 山似畫沙 is written as 山如畫沙, the meaning here is the same, 2093.

⁵¹ Dong and Ju is the abbreviation of Dong Yuan and Ju Ran. Dong Yuan and Ju Ran

Painting prefers “faint” rather than “clear”. The clear is like a hook, edge or angle while the faint is like clouds or fog.⁵² From this point of view, he esteemed the gentle style Dong and Ju’s paintings embodied. It was not only the inheritance of style from Dong Yuan, but also reflects the scholars’ preference of vagueness.

Dong’s admiration of Dong Yuan and Ju Ran mainly stemmed from his understanding of *shiqi* 士氣, which was the source of his spirit and thought as a literati official.⁵³ The vitality mentioned in the quote above directly discussed the application of calligraphic momentum in painting, but it goes beyond that, as it also expressed the idea and expectation of pursuing a natural, free, appreciable, and inhabitable landscape. The idea of the character *qi* 氣 will be discussed as an influential concept in Chinese ideology below.

Before talking about the *shiqi* concept, it is necessary to first discuss the term *shi* 士 or *shiren* 士人.⁵⁴ Yu Ying-shih 余英時 remarked in his book that: “The positive image of

developed long and short *pimacun* 披麻皴 respectively, which came to be one of the methods of landscape painting. He represented the structure and texture of rocks through a combination of flexible centerlines. This method is good at expressing the gentle and delicate texture of Jiangnan local mountains. This technique characterizes the School of Jiangnan landscape painting created by Dong and Ju.

⁵² *Huazhi*, 2179; this can also be founded in *Rongtai ji*, article 70 in the volume 6 of *bieji* (see Chinese text project <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=en&chapter=88687&remap=gb#p71>). “畫欲暗，不欲明。明者如觚稜鉤角是也。暗者如雲橫霧塞是也。”

⁵³ The idea of *shiqi* 士氣 is a more central concept of the ideal Chinese literati scholar other than *qiong* 窮 and *da* 達.

⁵⁴ Another version commonly used to refer the same group are *shidafu* 士大夫. The

Chinese traditional intellectuals is very solemn. They have self-identified with the *Dao* 道, and the *Dao* is intangible ... In order to make the *Dao* free from injustice, ancient Chinese intellectuals carried out both subjective and objective efforts.”⁵⁵ *Shiqi* is an approach to the *Dao* character. When talking about *qi* 氣, Dong was undoubtedly emphasizing the spiritual character of this highest state of art while trying to eliminate the mystery of *qi*. He implied that “collective vitality” can be achieved through spiritual cultivation and technical training.

Among the dynasties in Chinese history, the Song (960–1279) provides the most ideal context for discussing *shiqi* 士气. The Song dynasty could be called as the most prosperous period of the literati spirit. The emperors at that time praised the approach of “governing the country with literati scholars” 與士大夫治天下. Many emperors of the Song Dynasty, such as Emperor Huizong 宋徽宗 (1082 - 1135), were themselves literati painters. Under such circumstances, the financial and political status of scholars had undergone dramatical changes following the tumultuous late Tang and Five Dynasties periods when martial prowess was frequently necessary for ruling. An atmosphere of “honoring the literati” 以文為貴 had developed in society, and scholars had taken on a completely new appearance. The Song, then, was a time to which every member of the literati aspired. Some of the characteristics of the literati had emerged, advanced, and been passed down by the yearning of later generations. These included ideas, like “valuing righteousness more

concept of *shi* 士 are evolving during different dynasty and time period and cannot be explained as the same.

⁵⁵ Yu, Yingshi. *Shi yu zhongguo wenhua* 士與中國文化, 1987, 117, 121.

than profits” 重義輕利 or “serving people worldwide as one’s duty” 以天下為己任. As one of the educated elites, Dong’s value had been greatly influenced by the spirit of the Song Dynasty, and the same influence manifests in his paintings. This lineage remains apparent on Dong’s learning from three outstanding painters – the poet-statesman- painter Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037 - 1101), the landscape painter Mi Fu 米芾 (1051 - 1107) and his son Mi Youren 米友仁 (1086 - 1165). Apart from learning Mi Fu and his son’s brush skills and artistic conceptions, Dong studied a lot about the imbedded literati thinking modes and behavior patterns. The works of the Song era further advanced the effect of the literati lineage on Dong’s spirit after Wang Wei and Dong and Ju.

III

幽淡兩言，則趙吳興猶遜迂翁，其胸次自別也。⁵⁶

In terms of *you* 幽 and *dan* 淡, Zhao Wuxing is inferior to Weng with different *xiongci*.

In light of the painting techniques Dong Qichang inherited, his predecessors influenced both his mental state and his conception of literati and officialdom. This influence, to a great extent, brought about his yearning for seclusion and the joys found in nature, which was a direct source of his simple pursuit of elegance and innocence. In addition, based on his study of nature, he proposed a theory of “detachment” *dan* 淡 to coordinate orthodoxy and innovation in way that provided the foundation for his theory of painting and established his own style, to express and to build up his temperament. Dong put forward the theory of “lightness” to support his artistic and political objectives, and this theory also guided and regulated his temperament.

Among the “old masters” that Dong followed, Dong Yuan painted with wet and soft brushstrokes, making his artwork a more sophisticated embodiment of literati style. Dong Yuan’s feeling of “detached and unadorned” (*pingdan tianzhen* 平淡天真) and “misty air, light and moistened” (*lanqi qing run* 嵐氣清潤) greatly impacted Yuan and Ming Dynasty painters.⁵⁷ This was the main reason for Dong’s unique obsession with Dong Yuan’s work.

⁵⁶ *Huachanshi suibi*, 455. Zhao Wuxing 趙吳興 refers to Zhao Mengfu; Weng 翁 here is probably refers to Wang Wei as the originator of literati painting in Dong’s view.

⁵⁷ The idea of “平淡天真” will be further discussed in the following part as it played an

By using this style, Dong Yuan vividly showed the atmosphere of the Jiangnan landscape and the beautiful quietness of plain scenes. Anyone who has visited Jiangnan and then looked at Dong Yuan's work would absolutely feel they were there experiencing the scenery in personal. Shen Kuo 沈括 (1031-1095) wrote in his *Mengxi bitan* 夢溪筆談 about Dong Yuan's painting techniques. He commented that Dong Yuan was a skillful painter, especially in conveying a distant autumn misty vision of the real Jiangnan Mountains with gentle brushstroke.⁵⁸ Tracing back further, Dong Yuan's brushstroke style was derived from Wang Wei's skill with "rendering light" (*xuan dan* 渲淡) characteristics. In terms of their painting techniques, Dong Qichang and Dong Yuan were the same; in terms of the paintings' content, they also had many similarities: Dong Yuan's landscape painting reflected the thick and graceful sceneries along the area of Nanjing 南京, while Dong Qichang's painting expressed the clear and quiet of the sceneries along the area of Songjiang 松江.

The idea of *xiongci* found in Dong's comments above did not describe the status of literati scholars at first. *Xiong*, literally "chest," can be interpreted as "breast", or paired with other characters to mean "breadth of mind" 心胸 or 胸襟, or "great mind" 胸懷.⁵⁹

The similar interpretation was earlier used in Du Fu's 杜甫 (712-770) poem "Wang yue" 望

important role in the transfer of ideas from Dong Yuan and Ju Ran to Mi Fu and his son and then to Dong Qichang.

⁵⁸ The sentence "董源善畫，尤工秋嵐遠景，多寫江南真山，不為奇峭之筆" is from *Mengxi Bitan*, Shen Kuo, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 17 Calligraphy and Painting.

⁵⁹ Some of these interpretations of *xiong* are from Pleco dictionary.

嶽。 In the fifth line, Du Fu mentions *dangxiong* 蕩胸 which could be explained as his breast heaving in exhilaration or growing clouds and mists are sweeping past Du's breast.⁶⁰ Though there remain arguments about the precise meaning Du wanted to convey, his lines represented the natural reaction of people who visited well-known mountains and famous waters – feeling broad and generous in thoughts.

Xiong has been intensively used in describing the standard or ideal state of literature or art. When comparing painting and literature, Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045-1105) said that they both looked for *yun* 韻. This *yun*, defined by Bush as “overtone,” is the lingering trace of a work that remains in the viewer's mind but not *qiyun* that will discuss below. Based on this observation, Bush argues that Huang's emphasis on the purifying effect of study for the artist was undoubtedly derived from Du Fu.⁶¹ Huang reframed the painter's mind in another poem in which he comments on Su Shi's painting of a bare tree. He believed that hills and valleys were naturally in Su's mind from the beginning, allowing Su to make old trees twisted by wind and frost.⁶² Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) made similar comments on a Mi Fu landscape by: “These must be the exceptional scenes from the hills and

⁶⁰ Hsieh, Daniel. “Du Fu's ‘Gazing at the Mountain’”, 6.

⁶¹ Huang Tingjian, 黃庭堅, the famous Northern Song Dynasty writer, calligrapher. Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting*, 43-44. Huang's text was “凡書畫當觀韻” // “讀書破萬卷，下筆如有神”. Included in her discussions of Huang's writings, Bush further argues that Huang's stress on extensive reading probably influenced Dong Qichang when he wrote on the importance of education for an artist, 45.

⁶² “胸中元自有丘壑，故作老木蟠風霜。” *The Chinese Literati on Painting*, 46.

valleys in this old man's breast, poured forth altogether at that moment to embody his true appreciation".⁶³ This points to the statement that the artist's perception of creation and the formed artistic image are reflected in the painting without reservation, and the work will be naturally completed.⁶⁴

Going one step further, *xiongci* is a word that depicts the realm of one's mind. Tang Hou 湯垕 (fl. Yuan dynasty), used this word when mentioning Wang Wei: "This was out of the freedom and ease of one's mind, and the meaning found its way with excellent strokes that differed from the norm."⁶⁵ Wu Kuan 吳寬 in the Ming dynasty also used this word to praise Wang Wei and implied that the free and easy mind led the artist enter the realm of creating beauty.⁶⁶

In this sense, the form brought forth from the brushes of painters is a portrayal of their emotions. This act of creation allows the artist to release his subjective emotions. When

⁶³ “當是此老胸中丘壑最殊勝處，時一吐出以寄真賞耳。” *The Chinese Literati on Painting*, 47.

⁶⁴ This statement can also be seemed from Li Rihua's writing: “绘事不必求奇，不必循格，要在胸中吐出便是矣。” Li Rihua, 李日華, (1565-1635)。

⁶⁵ *Huajian* 畫鑒, Tang Hou, the Yuan Dynasty Connoisseur and Theorist. In *Huapin congshu* 畫品叢書, edited by Yu Anlan 于安瀾, 1982, 407. “盖胸次瀟灑，意之所至，落筆便於庸史不同。”

⁶⁶ *Zhongguo hualun da cidian* 中國畫論大辭典. Zhou Jiyin 周積寅 ed., 2011, 175.

applied with such skill, the painter creates art that comes from life but is not merely a mechanical copy of that life. The state of *xiong* therefore represents one of the highest pursuits of the literati – namely self-cultivation – and Dong connected this pursuit with artistic style.

IV

大抵傳為不傳，在淡與不淡；蘇子瞻曰：筆勢崢嶸，辭采絢爛，漸老漸熟，乃造平淡。⁶⁷

Whether a work is good enough to pass on depends on its degree of detachment; Su Zizhan has said: if the strokes are in perfect condition and undiminished splendor, the rhetoric is colorful and gorgeous, and the skill matures, then the *pingdan* is created.⁶⁸

As a central idea, the inheritance of the concept of *dan* can be derived from Dong's admiration towards Mi Fu and his son Mi Youren, especially their *mi dian shanshui* 米點山水. The aesthetic outlook and spirit of *mi dian shanshui* are “detached and unadorned” 平淡天真 and “self-realization” 自適其志. These features had a significant influence on Dong's creations and ideas. From his perspective, the swift trend of learning from Dong Yuan and Ju Ran, launched by Mi Fu and his son, advanced the lineage of literati painting. Dong Qichang's reverence of Dong Yuan's work was likely derived from Mi Fu's high appraisal of Dong Yuan's work as “a masterpiece which could not be compared with others”.⁶⁹ From Mi Fu's aesthetic point of view, Dong and Ju's “detached and unadorned”

⁶⁷ *Wei Pingzhong zi ce* 魏平仲字册 in *Rongtai ji*, article 151 in the volume 4 of *bieji* (see Chinese text project <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=en&chapter=943399&remap=gb#p152>). *Huazhi* phrases as “詩文書畫，少爾工，老爾淡。淡勝工，不工亦何能淡。東坡雲：筆勢崢嶸，文采絢爛，漸老漸熟，乃造平淡”，2178. The same idea of 漸老漸熟 (the maturing of skill) is also mentioned in *Huachanshi suibi* 431, 455.

⁶⁸ Su Zizhan 蘇子瞻 refers to Su Shi.

⁶⁹ “近世神品，格高無以比” is from *Huashi* 畫史 by Mi Fu (1051-1107). In *Huapin*

style came from their free and easy brushstrokes, and in the flexible and elegant mood conveyed in the relationship between ink and water. Mi Fu believed that the function of painting was to adapt one's interests; the appearance of painting was to be detached and naïve. This prevents the art from pretending to be intriguing, and to remain upright and majestic. This "self-adaptation" function matches the concepts of *jixing youxin* 寄興遊心 and *ink play* 墨戲 which undergird his thoughts on aesthetics.⁷⁰ These aspects also laid the foundation of and regulated the scope for future generations of literati painting.⁷¹ In addition, Mi Fu presented the idea that the function of painting is to entertain the painters' own ambitions; it should be simple and natural rather than being the ostentatious decorations of royalty. This idea is consistent with Dong's emphasis on painting as a form of self-cultivation for the literati.

Dong Qichang stated that: "For poetry, literature, calligraphy and painting, the infant stage is called *gong* 工, the mature stage is called *dan* 淡. *Dan* is superior to but cannot be

congshu 畫品叢書, edited by Yu Anlan 于安瀾, 1982, 215.

⁷⁰ *Jixing youxin* 寄興遊心 consists of two terms: 寄興 is the same as 興寄 and it refers to the deep meaning for literary and artistic works. 遊心 has two meanings – to devote oneself to something with great concentration, or to let one's thoughts or recollections flash across one's mind. It appears in the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi*: "Man in the World, Associated with other Men", "The Seal of Virtue Complete" and "The Normal Course for Rulers and Kings"; in the Outer Chapters: "Webbed Toes" and "Tian Zi-fang"; and in the Miscellaneous Chapters: "Ze-yang". See the Chinese Text Project to look at these in detail. <https://ctext.org/zhuangzi/zhs?searchu=%E9%81%8A%E5%BF%83>.

⁷¹ "On the Influence of 'Midian Scenic Painting' Upon the Later Scholar Painting", Hua Yaoru, *Hundred schools in art*, 2006, 54-55.

achieved without *gong*.”⁷² His citation from Su Shi also represented the idea of *gong erhou dan* 工爾後淡. *Dan* refers to a contented, quiet, and peaceful status that demonstrates the depth and extent of one’s erudition and cultivation, from which came a specific range of cherished values and qualities. Based on this belief of *dan*, Dong emphasized that *dan* comes after *gong* and was the accumulation of “work” and “familiarity”. It is exactly the same as another idea that: “The painter should first learn from the ancients, and then from heaven and earth.”⁷³ Apart from this, in the evaluation of character *dan* in *pingdan tianzhen*, Dong said that: “What is *dan*? The quality [of something] is natural, and this is what is referred to as *dan*.”⁷⁴

An example of this is clear from Dong Qichang’s discussion of the arrangement of the clouds in paintings. He proposed that “the excellent skill of a painter was all about the change of the clouds. However, the clouds should be presented among the mountains and water, rather than intentionally be outlined and colored. It was like they were steaming with ink, and can be called a lively charm.”⁷⁵ In one sense, it was a feature inherited from the landscapes

⁷² *Huazhi*, 2178.

⁷³ *Huachanshi suibi*, 448. “畫家以古人為師，已自上乘。進此，當以天地為師。”

⁷⁴ *Rongtai ji, Yimeitang jixu* 詒美堂集序 in the volume 1 of *bieji* (see Chinese text project <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=690758&remap=gb#p234>) “何為淡，質任自然，是之謂淡。”

⁷⁵ *Proceedings of the Symposium on Paintings and Calligraphy of Nanzong Beidou Dong Qichang*, edited by Macao Museum of Art, 2015, 27. “畫家之妙，全在煙雲變滅中。然山水中當著意煙雲，不可用勾染，當以墨漬出，全如氣蒸，冉冉欲墜，乃可稱生動

of the Mi family which met the requirements of “natural quality” (*zhiren ziran* 質任自然). In another sense, it provided a technical basis for the *dan* artistic conception of *gong erhou dan* 工爾後淡 and *jian lao jian shu* 漸老漸熟 and reproduced the natural landscape features through calligraphic style ink expression. His work *Yanjiang diezhang* 煙江疊嶂 was a masterpiece which displayed such techniques and ideas.⁷⁶ Dong’s *dan* required both a “natural quality” and consistency with the theories, presenting a sense of being both unadorned and elegant. When Dong applied this style to his calligraphy, it could be used to provide a literary elegance to official books; when it applied to his painting, it emphasized the skills achieved through practice (more imitation) as well as his literary sense. These characteristics made it famous in the Ming and Qing Dynasties.

The reason why this inheritance of *dan* reflects the spirit of the literati is that it can indeed be connected with some important concepts of Chinese philosophy. The emergence of Chinese landscape paintings reveals the spirit of Daoism. Some of the terms used to discuss landscape paintings are closely connected to Zhuangzi’s spiritual “harmony” (*he* 和) and “Dao”, and the concept of *dan* derives a lot from Daoist ideas. The word “unadorned” originated from one of the Zhuangzi’s core ideas called *fa tian gui zhen* 法天貴真, which Zhuangzi uses to criticize the aesthetic principles of Confucian etiquette.⁷⁷ It can be said

之韻。” *Huachanshi suibi*, 449. “畫家之妙，全在煙雲變滅中。” is also mentioned in *Huazhi*, 2098.

⁷⁶ Wang Minghao, “Analysis of the ‘bland and unadorned’ advocated by Dong Qichang from from his *yanjiang dielu*”, 2017.

⁷⁷ Unlike the Confucians who deified “heaven”, the Daoist regarded nature as “heaven”.

that almost everything in Zhuangzi's Daoism is expressed through the categories of "heaven" (tian 天) and "the relation between heaven and human" (*tianren guanxi* 天人關係). In addition, in Zhuangzi's opinion, Dao's characteristic is detached. As a result, the "genuineness" (*zhen* 真) of "heaven" also has a "detached" quality. "Bland" is a fundamental description of the qualities of *tianzhen*.⁷⁸

In terms of artistic spirit, Daoism's faint, simple and pure thought promotes the spirit. Applied to the basic point of landscape painting, the rhyme is "distinct" (*qing* 清) and "distant" (*yuan* 遠). Starting from the Daoist philosophy, Wang Wei first replaced the polychromatic painting with "splashed-ink landscape" (*pomo shanshui* 潑墨山水). Since then, artists established the perspective in landscape painting that one should treat *dan* as beauty and *zhen* as natural simplicity.

Dong's focus on *dan* also reflected the common choice of the literati to which he claimed to belong. Many scholars mentioned the concept of "detached and unadorned" consciously

⁷⁸ Claims from *Zhuangzi* that applied to this idea are: "Whose placidity is unlimited, while all things to be valued attend them" (澹然无极，而众美从之), "Vacancy, stillness, placidity, tastelessness, quietude, silence, and non-action - this is the Level of heaven and earth, and the perfection of the Dao and its characteristics." (夫虚静恬淡，寂漠无为者，天地之平尔道德之至), "Therefore the sages take their law from Heaven, and prize their (proper) Truth, without submitting to the restrictions of custom." (故圣人法贵天真，不拘与俗). Translations are based on the *Chinese Text Project*: <https://ctext.org/zhuangzi/zhs?searchu=%E6%B3%95%E5%A4%A9%E8%B4%B5%E7%9C%9F>.

or unconsciously in their works. For example, in the Six Dynasties, Bao Zhao 鮑照 (ca. 416 – 466) described Xie Lingyun’s 謝靈運 (385 – 433) poems “like the early bloomed lotus, natural and lovely.”⁷⁹ Li Bai 李白 (701 – 762) depicted *dan* in the line “Out of clear water, a lotus engraved by nature”.⁸⁰ Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007 - 1072) commented, “The meaning of bleak and bland is difficult to paint. [Even if] the painter got it, the viewer might not notice it.”⁸¹ When Su Shi commented on a poem by the Tang scholar-official Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773 - 819), he wrote that “seeing the simplicity in its meticulous text and rich content, it reflects the strong poetic flavor of an unadorned and natural art style”.⁸² “Unadorned” was the ultimate beauty, and “strong poetic flavor” was the charm of the “unadorned” beauty. These two constituted the sense of the Chinese art aesthetic paradigm of being seemingly detached but actually beautiful.

“Detached and unadorned” embodies the influence of Zhuangzi in the life and creations

⁷⁹ Bao Zhao was a writer in the Liu Song during the Northern and Southern Dynasties. Xie Lingyun was a well-known poet, Buddhist scholar, and traveler during the Northern and Southern Dynasties, the first poet to write abundant landscape poems. “如初發芙蓉，自然可愛” is from the biography of Yan Yanzhi 顏延之 in the *History of the Southern Dynasties* 南史顏延之傳; *furong* 芙蓉 is often-used as another name of lotus.

⁸⁰ Li Bai, “清水出芙蓉，天然去雕飾” from 《经乱离后天恩流夜郎忆旧游书怀赠江夏韦太守良宰》

⁸¹ Ouyang Xiu, “萧条淡泊，此難畫之意，畫家得之，覽者未必識也” from *Ouyang Wenzhong Gong Quan Ji*, 1967, 49-50.

⁸² Liu Zongyuan, Chinese writer, politician, and poet of the Tang Dynasty. “發纖秣與簡古，寄至味與澹泊” from 書黃子思詩集後 in *Sushi wenji*, 2124.

of literati scholars and painters, though they had different interpretations at different times.

It is full of feelings about the existence of reality and the impermanence of life. It also portrays the inner world of the scholars, and it is the idea that carries on the development and connotation of literati spirit.

畫家六法，一曰‘氣韻生動’，‘氣韻’不可學，此生而知之，自然天授。然亦有學得處，讀萬卷書，行萬裡路，胸中脫去塵濁，自然丘壑內營，立成鄴鄂，隨手寫出，皆為山水傳神。⁸³

There are six methods for artists: The first one is *qiyun shengdong* 氣韻生動. This “spirit-resonance”⁸⁴ (*qiyun* 氣韻) is innate and granted by the heaven. However, there is still a way to learn it; that is by reading ten thousand books and traveling ten thousand miles. By getting rid of the dust in the mind, one could naturally establish his intricate thoughts and build up his inner structure. From now on, every painting at hand will be expressions of spirits of mountains and rivers.

In this passage, the first point to discuss is Dong’s advice to “read ten thousand books” (*du wanjuanshu* 讀萬卷書). Here Dong meant that if a person wants to become an artist, he must study tradition and learn from the ancients. By “traveling thousand miles” (*xing wanlilu* 行萬裡路), he means one should practice a lot to master what one has learned. Dong’s own

⁸³ Huachanshi suibi, 446; *Huazhi*, 2090. 鄴鄂 Juan’e, literally means the city of Juan (now in Shandong province) and E (now in Hubei province), In combination with the context of the source, the meaning of “鄴鄂” here should be extended to “architecture”, the basic framework of painting. It is also referred to the basic framework of writing, calligraphy, etc. The sentence is written as “成立郭郭” which means to build up the city (inner city) in Yu’s version.

⁸⁴ See “spirit-resonance” and the discussion of its counterpart “form-likeness” in Chou Ju-hsi’s *Painting Theory in Eighteenth-Century China*, 330. For a translation of the passage where the “spirit-resonance” was discussed by Su Shi, see Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literature on Painting*, 42.

experience demonstrates these two ideas well. He revered ancient traditions and never stopped learning. His learning from the ancients, however, was selective, and this selection was systematic and changed with his increasing experience and maturity. In the process of learning from the ancients, he not only formed and then perfected his own painting techniques, but also inherited the literati spirit contained in literati paintings; his theory of *Southern and Northern School* is not only the best representation of his art achievement and literati spirit, but also the best summary of this selective inheritance.

The idea of “reading ten thousand books” can also be traced back to the Tang dynasty, as seen in Du Fu’s poem “Twenty-two rhymes presented to assistant secretary of the left Wei”: “Read wide and you can wisely write” 讀書破萬卷，下筆如有神。⁸⁵ Although Dong Qichang specifically discusses it as a painting standard; he further identified reading as an important way to improve one’s *xiongci*, and he saw the idea of reading ten thousand books as useful in other pursuits, such as calligraphy. If *xiongci* is regarded as a higher state that the creator has accumulated over time, then *qiyun* could be regarded as a superior state and requirement of the creator in Dong’s theory. *Qiyun*, as an innate property in Dong’s view, acquired its theoretical foundation and had undergone considerable development before Dong.

⁸⁵ The English title for 奉贈韋左丞丈二十二韻 comes from Watson Burton’s translation *The selected poems of Du Fu, Translations from the Asian classics*. 2002, 32.

Apart from the famous reading and practicing argument, Dong identified a rather important concept in this passage – *qiyun* 氣韻. The discussion of “Six Methods” first appeared in Xie He’s 謝赫 (fl. Southern Dynasty) *Guhua Pinlu* 古畫品錄 back to around 3rd century.⁸⁶ Since then, succeeding generations of artists and theories used and further developed *qiyun* based on their own experiences and understandings. This elegant aesthetic consciousness could be regarded as part of the “collective vitality” of literati painting.

Literally, *qiyun shengdong* 氣韻生動 means that the images portrayed in the work have a vivid vigor and charm, and appear to be full of vitality. *Qiyun* was originally used to describe a figure in paintings during Wei and Jin period. Words such as *fengyun qiulai* 風韻道邁 were used to refer to the figure’s temperament and charm as displayed by his posture and expression. In Xie He’s time, when figure painting was a popular genre, *qiyun* was the standard for creation and evaluation. It originally focused on how well the work depicted the object’s grace and charm, but this concept gradually incorporated more factors about the performance of the subject.

In the Tang, *qiyun* applied only to images of living beings in paintings. This perspective served as the basis of Zhang Yanyuan’s discussion of the rules of Xie He. In Song times, while the sense of life was still valued in painting, especially in figure painting,

⁸⁶ Xie He, *Guhua pinlu* 古畫品錄. In *Huapin congshu* 畫品叢書, edited by Yu Anlan 于安瀾, 1982, 6. “六法者何? 一氣韻生動是也, 二骨法用筆是也, 三應物象形是也, 四隨類賦彩是也, 五經營位置是也, 六傳移模寫是也。”

art critics could also apply *qiyun* to landscape painting, to the painting as a whole and even to the use of brush and ink. In the early Northern Song, the famous connoisseur Guo Ruoxu 郭若虛 gave the most outstanding reinterpretation in his *Tuhua Jianwen Zhi* 圖畫見聞志. He claimed that most great paintings were created by literati painters or recluses who conveyed their noble feelings in their work; hence he claimed: “If a man maintains great character, the *qiyun* of his work must inevitably be high.”⁸⁷ Xie He presented *qiyun* as only one of the artistic standards of painting criticism; it had nothing to do with ideological content or the author’s character. Under this standard, the artist could achieve this “spirit-consonance” merely through an in-depth observation and understanding of the object. The skill is related to the artist’s concrete ability to understand things and did not consider the artist’s own spiritual quality. In Guo Ruoxu’s point of view, the character of the artist is innate and is determined according to social status rather than the artist’s spiritual state.

In Yuan times, according to Tang Hou – the most articulate representative of the Yuan literati art theory – the correct way to look at the sketches of literati painters was to attempt to “interflow” with the painter. The impression received from a painting as a whole should convey a sense of the artist himself and his ways of thinking. Therefore, the painter’s

⁸⁷ “人品既已高矣，氣韻不得不高，氣韻既已高矣，生動不得不至。” Elsewhere in *Tuhua jianwen zhi*, Guo further discussed the idea “風力氣韻”. In *Huashi congshu* 畫史叢書, edited by Yu Anlan 于安瀾, 1962, 328. “風力” here means “風骨” – the spirit of strength of character or vigor of style.

personality was of the utmost importance and the subject and the technical skills displayed were of the secondary concern. ⁸⁸

By the late Ming dynasty, Dong Qichang further elaborated on this concept, arguing that if an artist developed his *qiyun* he could then convey the spirit of the landscape. ⁸⁹ The spirit conveyed in landscape paintings was the literati's yearning for and attainment of freedom. ⁹⁰ Though he agreed with Guo Ruoxu that *qiyun* was an innate character, Dong provided a way to improve it. One could acquire this learning through reading ten thousand books and traveling ten thousand miles. The former required profound literacy and the later required a direct and comprehensive observation of the world. Satisfying these two, the artist can stand aloof with vivid landscapes as well as the indomitable spirit derived from the mountains in mind and therefore convey the spirit of landscape to fill the painting with "spirit-consonance".

Dong shed light on the transformation from the artist's inner cultivation into an external expression, so as to achieve a unity of subjectivity and objectivity. This asks for the

⁸⁸ This summary of the Tang, Song, Yuan and Ming understandings of *qiyun* should be attributed chiefly to Susan Bush. A comprehensive discussion and categorization of Xie He's "Six Methods" is available in Bush's book *The Chinese Literati on Painting*, 1971, 13-25, 127. Bush stated that: "Since the first of Xie's laws, *qiyun shengdong*, is the corner stone of Chinese art theory, its varying interpretation in different periods can serve as a guide to fundamental changes in outlook."

⁸⁹ Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting*, 1971, 22.

⁹⁰ Qiu, Wen, 邱雯, "Dong Bangda yishu chutan 董邦达艺术初探", 83-86.

integration of the *qiyun* of the artist with the subject of the painting and the painting itself.

By arguing that *qiyun* can be cultivated through this specific way, Dong linked the personal quality with reading and the creation of calligraphy or painting. The statement that only the literati with higher cultural and ideological qualities could create pieces with *qiyun* not only provides a way to improve the depth and social status of the literati's work, but also further promotes the literati's high-quality sentiment and consolidates the status of literati painting.

After Dong, *qiyun* gradually came to refer to the overall intrinsic quality of the form of the image that is the integration of both the subject and object. Being able to express the vivid charm of both the painter and the painting object is still one of the highest goals of painting until now. *Qiyun* and *chuanshen* 傳神 are basically consistent in explaining the spiritual characteristics of the character's image. But the discrepancy became more prominent after the evolution of *qiyun*. The word *chuanshen* refers to the inner sentiment conveyed by the facial expression of a character, especially through the eyes according to Gu Kaizhi and later generation. On the other hand, *qiyun* refers more to the whole character, and it especially emphasizes the inner sentiment conveyed by posture and speech. Following this lineage, such spirit influenced later painters like Wang Yuanqi 王原祁 and Dong Bangda 董邦達.

As with the term *shiqi* 士氣 mentioned earlier, *qiyun* is also an enduring characteristic of literati self-cultivation. Both words stem from the ultimate philosophical concept in the

Chinese tradition – the idea of *qi* 氣. Exploring some attributes of *qi* would shed some light on the standard literati concepts Dong inherited and promoted.

Qi was explained by Mencius as the energies of dispositions (*xing* 性) such as pleasure, anger, grief and sadness. It was also connected to “emotion” (*qing* 情) or a “transactional nature of feeling” (*xin* 心). All of them are necessary components for one to achieve the ultimate goal – the Dao 道.⁹¹ In this way, *qi* was like a link inherited by the literati from the times of Confucius and Mencius, but it transformed over time, as revealed by changing explanations of what *qi* is. In Dong’s era, *qi* is the spirit, cultivation requirement and thinking pattern that he could use to compare and compete with the “old masters”. Through his high praise of *qiyun*, Dong inherited and carried forward the theory of painting, followed some core principles of literati spirit, and promoted himself and the literati as a group.

⁹¹ Behuniak, James. *Mencius on Becoming Human*. 80-89. See also the explanation of human disposition as good and the detailed analyses of elements as *qi* to accomplish this good.

Conclusion

As Susan Bush states in the conclusion of her book:

“The unique aspects of Chinese literati painting are reflected in its theory. Scholars’ painting was first and foremost the art of an elite group. Su Shih and his friends shared the same social attitudes rather than the same styles. It is only during the late Ming period that Tung Ch’i-ch’ang and his circle of friends are united by common artistic aims. This progression is illustrated by the writings of scholar-critics on painting.”⁹²

There are two ideas here that can be furthered by studying Dong’s art texts. The first is that Dong’s theory of landscape painting should be first and foremost regarded as the art theory of an elite group and the second is that his theory is to a significant degree a progression from the accomplishments of his former masters, who resided within the same social group as he did.

If we carefully analyze the famous literati painters in Chinese history, we find out that they were always not artists first; their primary goal in life was not always becoming accomplished in art. They were or they tried to be famous for something else besides their painting, such as being the statesmen (which was the primary goal for most of the literati), scholars, writers, calligraphers, or connoisseurs. They often gained renown and came to be included among literati due to some other achievements. For example, Wen Zhengming 文徵明 (1470 - 1559), Zhao Mengfu and Dong Qichang all seemed to have gained more prestige in calligraphy at first.⁹³ When Dong preferred the kind of painting of Wang Wei to

⁹² Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting*, p. 184.

⁹³ The similar statement that the Chinese literati painters are not merely artists from Su Shi’s time can be seen in Bush’s book *The Chinese Literati on Painting*, p.

that of Li Sixun, surely Wang's fame as a statesman and poet influenced this judgment.

Dong Qichang belonged to the literati; he followed some of the rules everyone within that group agreed to. The theory of painting is the embodiment of his thought. His thought came from his education and worldview, and it reflects his relationships and similarities and differences with people in that group. The shared education and worldview of the literati shaped their values, which continuously evolved over succeeding generations. In this sense, in studying Dong Qichang one can not only learn about him but also about the literati. This is possible through understanding Dong's own self-conception and his similarities with other literati. It also reveals why he inherited his views and how his choices affected himself and other members of his social group.

As this paper has demonstrated, Dong's style exhibited a strong connection with the old masters. He imitated them, learning the styles of their strokes styles as well as their patterns of thinking. Through his work, the identity of Dong as both a literati painter and a scholar shines through as he used his brushes as tools to promote and defend the venerated spirit advocated by the old masters. He infused common concepts such as *wen* and *pingdan tianzhen*, into his work. While pursuing what is commonly referred to as orthodoxy, Dong also deployed the past to serve the present, laying the foundation for his painting in theory and practice. While following the lineage and not deviating from the orthodox tradition, Dong nevertheless stood out and above the literati community. While he emphasized imitation – which was common among artists, Dong was able to highlight his own

characteristics as an artist, and this resulted in a far-reaching impact in the field of Chinese literati and art history. This is unusual. In his practice, Dong accentuated the lineage in art and infused that lineage with a lively spirit. His syntheses were not passive but sharpened the lineage and imbued the tradition with the defining spirit of literati culture.

When studying the lineage of the art theory of literati painters like Dong, there is an inevitable question: Is this inheritance genetic or cultural?⁹⁴ Though Dong Qichang claimed that *qiyun* could not be taught, he thought it could be gained in part from books and travel. From this point of view, it is clear that Dong argued the inheritance down the line of literati painters was more cultural than innate, even though there were some seemingly inconsistent features between painters in different time periods.

Literati painters chose their own way to express their outlets by fitting themselves into the literati group. Their choices gradually established a lineage of artists and allowed it to evolve. The reason that it is possible to see the connections between different generations of painters from the critical concepts in their painting theory is because of something that I would call “empathy”. With this “empathy”, a painter could reach an agreement with the old masters by way of the general philosophy upheld by Chinese scholars. This agreement involved their social status, philosophy, and goals. Learning and imitating created a foundation for “empathy”, and “empathy” could be achieved under certain similar contexts.

⁹⁴ The detailed discussion of genetic or cultural inheritance can be seen in *Mencius on Becoming Human*, p. 74.

This ability was not arbitrary but could be obtained through learning, thinking and connecting with similar minds within a given group. It was not about time and space. Empathy could be seen through the inheritance of lineage and cultural enlightenment. With the help of imitation mentally and in practice, Dong reached a good agreement with the “old masters”, and this agreement was reflected in the critical concepts he shared with his predecessors and further advanced in his works.

It is not fully illustrated in this paper, however, how Dong came up his distinctive style. This question remains to be explored further through analyses of the social context Dong was in and how he was instructed to be a member of the Ming literati. Further studies should explore more literati concepts that connected Dong with his predecessors in a broader sense and take into account the political, social and social clan factors present in the Ming in order to figure out the outstanding position of Dong and his impact on Chinese history. Detailed translations of Dong’s full art theory texts along with the study of his other literature is also needed.

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