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## *Image and Self-Cultivation: The Influence of Confucian Epistemology on the Evolution of Painting Subjects*

WANG PING, received Ph.D. degree from China Academy of Art. He is a professor of Fine Arts School at the Hangzhou Normal University, China. His research interests are Chinese landscape painting, Chinese art ideology and digitization method for Iconography.

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**Address:** 281 Esteban Way, San Jose, CA 95119, USA

**Email:** artfrontier2023@outlook.com

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# Image and Self-Cultivation: The Influence of Confucian Epistemology on the Evolution of Painting Subjects

Wang Ping

## Abstract

Gewu (格物) is a Confucian theory about the systematic study of things, which will directly affect the painting's subject matter. In the process of collecting, classifying, and documenting the spectrum of painting subject matter in the Song Dynasty, we found that the richness of a landscape's painting subject matter is unique. Through investigating the history of thought and cultural history, we found that in the era of this painting the development of China's "erudite culture" was at its peak. It was this culture and concept that gave birth to this painting style. Through this research we realized, if only from the point of iconography itself, these works can be perceived as boring and meaningless, but through art history or cultural history their value will be displayed.

## Key Words

Iconology, iconography, subject matter, Gewu, Chinese painting

## 1. The Status Quo of Iconology Studies in China

Iconology studies have been developing in China for 40 years. Important researchers and theoretical works in the interpretation field of iconology theory are concentrated in Europe and the United States, such as Fan Jingzhong, Yi Ying, Cao Yiqiang, Shao Hong, Chang Ningsheng, Li Benzhen, Lothar Ledderose, James Cahill, Wu Hung, Hung Zaixin and others. The active translation and introduction of these scholars' work have made important contributions to the spread of iconology science in China. However, iconology based on Chinese art as the focus of its research has not really been formed so far. At present, China's iconology studies can be summarized into three directions: first, the translation, criticism, and historical research of iconology theory; second, the use of iconology methods to analyze a piece of work, a theme-type art work, or the use of iconology to discuss the social background and cultural context of its creation; third, the sorting of the genealogy of a certain theme and subject matter, and tapping into the reasons for its cross-time and cross-cultural communication. It stands to reason that the theoretical perspective and method of iconology can have a significant impact on, and promotion of,

Chinese art research. However, China's iconology has always stagnated at the theoretical discussion level. In actual case studies, the research by Chinese art history scholars on iconology does not involve the interpretation of the ideology and the ideas but focuses on the research of archeology and social history. Therefore, China's iconology, in essence, is more like archeology.

On the other hand, Chinese scholars have many difficulties in iconology studies. For example, most Chinese museums and libraries have not made the rights available to access document data, making it very difficult for literature searches and the transmission of data. Secondly, the image classification and index research on Chinese art has just started—it has not existed before. The academic community also lacks the inheritance and construction of a special art image library in the academic community. Therefore, Chinese scholars all start with the collection of image data for every research case, so the research tends towards textology, archeology, and authentication. Based on the above reasons and status, if iconology in China is to develop by leaps and bounds, we must pay attention to the construction of imagery research and the construction of image literature databases, and to establish a knowledge system for Chinese art images.

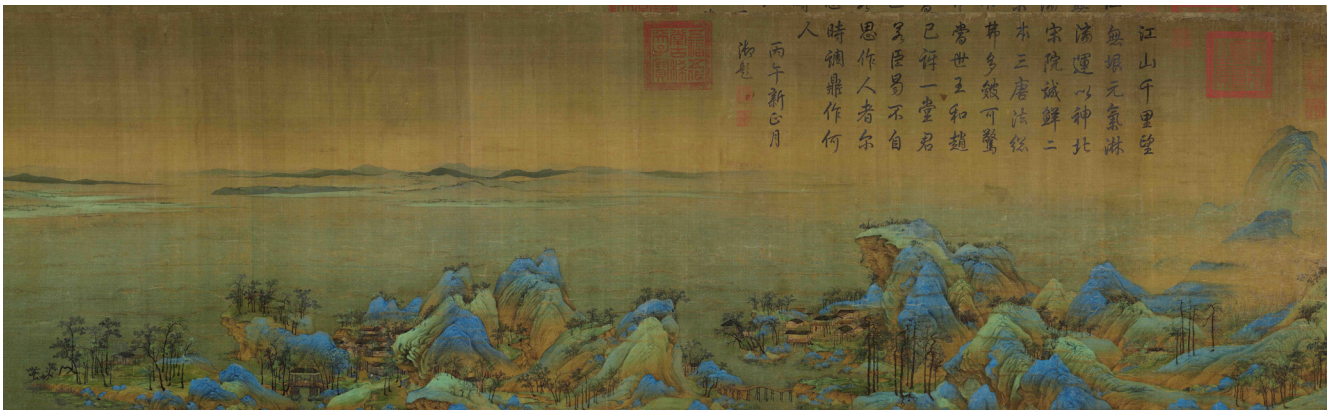


Figure 1. Wang Ximeng. *Endless River and Mountain*. Heavy-color on silk, 51.5×1191.5 cm, China, Song Dynasty. The Palace Museum, Beijing.

This is a huge project. We can start from a painting, as is done by Aby Warburg and the Valburg school, to accumulate knowledge and advance the field.

## 2. Subject Matter and Theoretical Discovery of Landscape Painting

In the past two years, we have attempted to build a database of Chinese painting images. In the process of extracting, labeling, and classifying the themes and subjects of ancient landscape paintings, we have encountered a number of problems that have not been addressed in the field of traditional Chinese art historiography.

To build a database, we first need to establish a logical structure of the image corpus, which is determined by the list of terms that refer to the subject matter. In order to explore the terminological hierarchy and genealogical framework of the list of terms, we selected the subject “fisherman’s father”, which has the largest number of images and the richest semantics in landscape painting, as the sample. To ensure the depth and breadth of the structure of the list terms, we reviewed the publicly published catalogues of Chinese painting collections in museums worldwide since 1990. From these collection catalogues, we collected information about 14,475 ancient Chinese landscape paintings. From these works, we identified and selected 631 images of the “fisherman” by using the method of pictorial history and studied these thematic images in terms of graphic similarity and classification of periods and genres. In the process of collecting, classifying, and annotating thematic images, we found a very special painting, Wang Ximeng’s (王希孟, b.1096) *Endless River and Mountain* (《千里江山圖》)<sup>1</sup> from the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127), which is the one with the largest variety of “boats and figures” in the entirety of Chinese landscape painting history.

Wang Ximeng was a student of Emperor Huizong (R.1101-1125) of the Song Dynasty and is said to have been less than 20 years old when he painted this painting. The painting is in a horizontal frame in hand-held format, 51.5 cm high and a full 1,191.5 cm long. In such a long, narrow frame, the artist used heavy lapis lazuli and malachite pigments to depict in detail a continuous, grand landscape of mountains and rivers from a perspective similar to an overhead view. In the picture, on both sides of the long river, the mountains are continuous, populated with all kinds of houses, villages, trees and meadows, and there are more than 140 boats of

50 kinds scattered on the river and along the shore; the large ones are more than 10 cm and the small ones are less than 1 cm. There are more than 300 figures on the boats, and their identities and behavioral states are also diverse (there may be images that were missed and not counted because the scale was too small).

We can see from the image corpus that the images of boats in *Endless River and Mountain* can be classified into four categories according to the basic form of craft: canoe, awning boat, sailing, and catamarans. Each category can be classified according to details, for example, boats with canopies are divided into two categories: one by canopy length—short canopies and long canopies, and one by canopy material—grass, cloth and wooden sheds. Boats can also be classified according to use: useless boats, fishing boats, boats for casting nets, ferries, excursion boats, cargo boats, multi-purpose boats for the fishermen’s home life, etc. According to the spatial position of boats in the picture, there are images of boats in three spatial levels: near, middle, and far view, and the size ratio of boats and figures changes slightly according to the distance and space. If we look at the combination of boats and figures, there are those that travel or dock alone, two or more that travel or dock together, groupings of similar boats, and many different kinds of boats grouped together. Therefore, the classification and labeling of a theme image of “boats and figures” requires at least eight layers of index entries vertically and six layers horizontally to cover all kinds of things pertaining to boats and their features. Take the index annotation of “fisherman” as an example, the first layer should identify and annotate “vessels and figures”. The second layer should identify and annotate the behavior of the figures, i.e., “fishing on vessels”. The third layer should identify and label “boat” and “fisherman’s gender” respectively. The fourth layer should identify and label “which boat” and “fisherman’s age” respectively, the fifth layer labels the “boat’s dynamics” and “fisherman’s clothing”. The sixth layer identifies and labels the “boat’s spatial location”, the seventh layer identifies and labels the relationship between this thematic image and the whole painting. The eighth layer identifies and labels the painting technique of this thematic image. The ninth layer identifies and labels the moral meaning of the thematic image. There is also information about the painting and the author, etc. which needs to be marked one by one.

We were extremely shocked by the huge number of subjects in *Endless River and Mountain*, and the heavy workload of editing and sorting the subjects made us anxious. At the same time, we also discovered

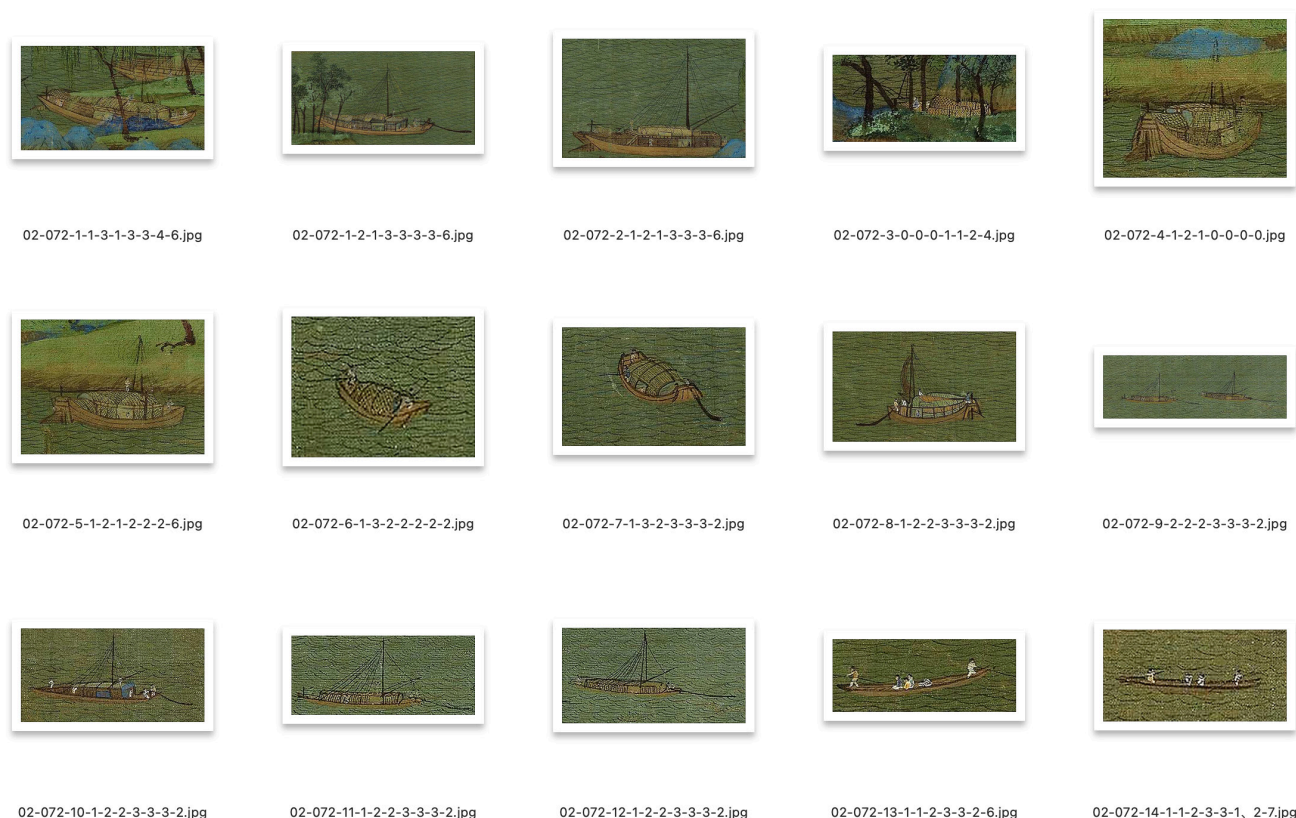


Figure 2. The boat character subject matter of *Endless River and Mountain* in the images corpus (excerpt).

an important question: why has no scholar of Song landscape painting ever given a more in-depth explanation or researched this extremely special work and phenomenon? The subjects in *Endless River and Mountain* are not only boat figures, but there are also other subjects in great quantity and variety, there is no other painting of similar form in Chinese art history, and it is also extremely rare in world art history.

Using contemporary experience in landscape painting production, one would imagine that painting such a work, with such a wide variety of boat characters, life scenes, and mountain landscapes, with each boat and each character rigorously and meticulously carved in detail, this is very difficult. Before painting, an artist must have several years making drawings and sketches of the countryside, have collected materials on a large scale, traveled, and been on a series of expeditions. However, it is clear from the inscription of Chancellor Cai Jing (1047-1126) that Wang Ximeng was only 18 years old when he painted this painting, and that it took only 6 months. So, we have some questions. Why did Wang express so many subject matters in a landscape painting? Was it an order from the emperor? Was it his personal talent and pursuit? Was it the influence of a trend of the times? It is interesting to note that Zhang

Zeduan's (張擇端) *Riverside Scene on the Qingming Day* (《清明上河圖》)<sup>2</sup>, by a painter of the same period as Wang, is also a painting that contains a wide variety of subjects, although the subjects are people and urban activities. These two paintings can be considered the twin stars in the history of Chinese painting in terms of their huge number of elements and subjects as well as a high artistic level. We found, in addition to the paintings of the Southern Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, that after *Endless River and Mountain* there has never been a masterpiece in China's landscape painting history that we can compare it with in terms of subject matter. Not only are there no landscape paintings with a huge number of subjects, but all landscape paintings clearly show the trend of a gradual reduction in the number of subject categories. This phenomenon is not only evident in landscape painting, but also in the decreasing numbers in subject matter for figure painting and flower-and-bird painting; for example, some painters only painted plum, orchids, bamboo, and chrysanthemums, or even only one of those. Obviously, such a long and generalized evolutionary trend cannot be explained by the painter's personal interest or expertise, but rather by the existence of a decisive factor at the level of social culture and ideology.

### 3. The Two-Idea type of Confucian Gewu Concept

Song Dynasty painting focused on the strict and detailed depiction of objects and a wide variety of subjects, which is more commonly interpreted as being influenced by the Neo-Confucian concept of Gewu, and the artistic style was as “realistic (寫實)” as classical Western oil painting. The word Gewu has been interpreted as science or “the study/investigation of the nature of things”. Throughout history scholars have had varied understandings of the meaning of the term. “Some emphasize a thorough inquiry of principles in contact with things. Others stress personal practice in order to master all kinds of moral conduct and skills. Still, others consider their intentions as things, thus reforming their innermost thoughts as studying things.”<sup>3</sup> Some dictionaries elaborate on this by pointing out that Gewu is an important concept in the epistemological methodology of the *Daxue* (《大學》) and Neo-Confucianism, a Confucian study of the “rules of the existence of all things”, which has now been lost;<sup>4</sup> but is this really the case? If one has read Zhu Xi’s (朱熹, 1130-1200) treatise on the subject, one will know that “lost” refers to Zhu Xi’s belief that the chapter on Gewu in the *Daxue* may have been lost.<sup>5</sup> In fact, in the thousands of years before Zhu, Gewu was neither an important concept of Confucianism nor was *Daxue* an important treatise about Confucianism. For the aristocrats and Confucian students, the *Daxue* addresses their common ambitions and values, such as “self-cultivation (修身)” “family regulation (齊家)” “state governance (治國)”, and “bringing peace to all (平天下)”.<sup>6</sup>

From the perspective of intellectual history, the most serious catastrophe of the collapse of the Han Dynasty was the unrealizable political authority theory of the “divine right of kings”. Therefore, during the Wei and Jin dynasties, scholar-officials and Confucian scholars were most concerned with the existence of gods and their legitimacy, and in order to explore the mysterious “Way of Heaven” they began to pay attention to heaven and earth and all things, and were knowledgeable about and interested in the unknown. In order to acquire a wide range of knowledge, the phenomenon of compiling “*lei books*” occurred (類書, reference books with material taken from various sources and arranged according to subjects), a series of books that emerged from the official and private sectors. Official books such as *Huang Lan* (《皇覽》) and *XiuWenDian Yulan* (《修文殿御覽》), and the private books such as *Bowu Zhi* (《博物志》) and *Er Ya* (《爾雅》), have been handed down to the present day. Moreover, the knowledge of the past and

the wide knowledge of the present became the criteria for evaluating the learning and character of noblemen and talented persons. The historian Zheng Qiao (鄭樵, 1104-1162) called this way of seeking knowledge “erudite informed (博學)”, the most obvious feature of which is that the object of natural things is to form common sense knowledge through visual observation and induction of visual experience. The principles of “observe everything (觀物)” “erudite exploration of all things (博物)” “depicting all things (詠物)” “feeling all things (感物)”, and then knowing and feeling the metaphysical “Way of Heaven (天道)” put the focus on the universe, exploring the nature of humanity and all things and maximizing their natural roles, helped by the development of the common-sense system and rational spirit of Chinese culture; this formed the peak of the erudite trend in the Song Dynasty.

At the beginning of the Song Dynasty, Emperor Taizong (939-997) attached great importance to compiling and organizing historical documents and various kinds of knowledge, and he ordered his ministers to compile large books of unprecedented scales, such as *Tai Ping Yu Lan* (《太平御覽》), *Tai ping Guangji* (《太平廣記》), and *Ce Fu Yuan Gui* (《冊府元龜》). At the same time, private individuals were also keen to compile information, resulting in the books that have been handed down to this day, such as *Qunshu Kaosuo* (《群書考索》), *Yu Hai* (《玉海》), *Gujin Hebi Shilei Beiyao* (《古今合璧事類備要》), *Bowu Zhi* (《續博物志》), etc. Each of these collections of literature and tools of general knowledge about nature took years to complete, with hundreds or thousands of volumes of content. In the middle of the Northern Song Dynasty, various schools in the Confucianism Risorgimento reinterpreted the meaning of Gewu and self-cultivation according to their own academic positions. The representative figures are Shao Yong (邵雍, 1011-1077), Wang Anshi (王安石, 1021-1086), Su Shi (蘇軾, 1037-1101), Cheng Yi (程頤, 1033-1107) and Zhu Xi. “Observing everything” is an important theory of Shao Yong. He emphasized the separation of human and nature, and that human beings should transcend their personal emotions and value projections and derive pleasure from the process of observing nature and discovering the heavenly way. Wang Anshi believed that scholars should not only be “erudite and well informed” and “familiar with classics scholarship”, but should also think independently and not follow others blindly. Su Shi thought that the focus was on how different things are governed by different principles, so that these principles represent their diversity. Only when one is “erudite and well informed” can one grasp

the common sense of things and maintain physical and mental freedom and moral conviction in the midst of life's difficulties.<sup>7</sup> Especially in the process of creating art, Su believed that one should keep his mind focused so as to allow the imagination to search freely in the universe. When one's mind reaches the farthest end, all confusion will dissipate, and images will clearly emerge in one's mind one after another "taking advantage of the circumstances to let your mind wander freely" (*Zhuang Zi*, 《莊子》). Among the several *Gewu* theories of the Northern Song Dynasty, Su's theory had an erudite, aesthetic, and creative character, and profoundly influenced the nobles, scholars, artists, and later admirers who gathered around him.

In terms of actual political and social influence during the Song Dynasty, the school led by Wang Anshi and Su Shi dominated the national cultural discourse. However, among the people, their ideas were challenged and criticized by the emerging neo-Confucian scholars, represented by Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi. According to Cheng, the ultimate purpose of *Gewu* is to seek a metaphysical basis for morality, so there are strict steps and orders in *Gewu*, and even if one wants to explore all things, one should take the cultivation of reason and virtue as the foundation. Zhu further pointed out that a great deal of knowledge can confuse people, that excessive attention to things with energy and interest can make people feel lost, and that the thought and practice of *Gewu* can also be superior or inferior. He said: "Knowledge is to be heeded by all, and near thought is to be concentrated on. The erudition is a large-scale, and the near thinking is a progressive work." The meaning is that erudition is only a large-scale, cursory skimming, while "cut near the question thinking" is a focused analysis and inquiry from near to far, from shallow to deep, layer by layer.<sup>8</sup> "Cut near the question thinking" is the *Gewu* method of Neo-Confucianism proposed by Zhu Xi, also known as *Gezhi* (格致) or "explore the nature of all things (窮理盡性)".

The theoretical and methodological study of *Gewu* emerged in the Song Dynasty and became the core proposition of Neo-Confucian theory, which became a landmark theory in the academic and intellectual history of the Song Dynasty. However, we should note that it was not the *Gewu* theory of Cheng and Zhu that actually existed and had the greatest influence at that time. Even in the Ming and Qing dynasties, *Gewu* theory still existed in two directions: erudition and "cut near the question" thinking; most of the erudition scholars believed that everything has its own order, so *Gewu* means to summarize the common form and common sense through repeated observation and a large number of

experiences over a long period of time, to "attain to the broad and great while addressing the delicate and minute". This concept was popular among *Shuxue* (蜀學), *Xinxue* (新學) and the third lineage of the Neo-Confucian of the Faith, and became a node of cultural exchange between China and the West during the Ming and Qing dynasties. The Neo-Confucianist believes that, "Natural law is the essence or the source of things, deciding the inherent nature of humans and things. It is the law of nature and the foundation of moral conduct in human society. They believed that to understand the world and oneself, and to reform the world and improve oneself are a process of interaction and unity. Only when such process advances can the harmony between humanity and all things be accomplished."<sup>9</sup> After the Song and Yuan dynasties, erudition was rejected by Neo-Confucians and gradually forgotten, while Zhu Xi's *Gewu* thought and the *Daxue* became a must-read as the official textbooks in schools and for imperial examinations, which had a great impact on ancient Chinese education.<sup>10</sup>

In the Ming Dynasty, Wang Shouren (王守仁, 1472-1529) redefined *Gewu* on the basis of *Zhuxi*. He believed that the value of Confucianism is "how to become a morally perfect sage", and that moral legitimacy does not originate from all things but from the innate nature of each person to be good. Therefore, *Gewu* means to rectify one's mind and be sincere in thought; that is, to purify one's will for goodness in one's daily physical and mental activities, and there is no need to look for the origin of human morality in the laws of natural existence. On the theoretical level Wang's theory is great, highlighting the moral-philosophical nature of Confucianism and making the theory and practice of Confucianism concise and convenient, but his theory also further obliterated the already underdeveloped epistemology and drive for knowledge in Chinese culture, leaving Confucian scholars for centuries thereafter obsessed with ancient texts and uninterested in all things natural in the objective world.

By synthesizing the above discussion, we can confirm that, firstly, *Gewu* is an epistemological and intellectual proposition in Confucian culture, and its ultimate goal is to achieve moral cultivation. Secondly, the theoretical connotation of *Gewu* is evolving, and there are various the oretical types and schools of thought as Confucianism develops, such as erudition, "erudite for explore of all things" "cut near the question thinking" and "attaining *liangzhi* (致良知)". Thirdly, the idea of *Gewu*, which is "erudite for explore of all things", had a great influence in the Song Dynasty; to a certain extent, it became the theoretical basis for the rise of landscape

painting, flower-and-bird painting, and the formation of a rigorous and meticulous artistic style. Fourthly, whether it was the Confucian “erudite and Atsushi” or the “metaphysics in the Wei and Jin dynasties”, “let the eye travel over the great scenes and spiritual freedom” shows viewing as the main way. When the artistic pursuit of metaphysics returned to Confucian moral cultivation, viewing landscapes and flowers and birds became justified, as in Zhu Xi’s doctrine of “reading and meditating” and “studying and studying”. That is to say, before the popularization of Zhu Xi’s doctrine of “studying and meditating” and “studying and rationalizing”, images such as landscape painting and flower-and-bird painting were used to assist in the cultivation of one’s body.

#### 4. The Influence of Gewu Thought on Landscape Painting Subjects

In the process of summarizing and counting ancient Chinese landscape painting subjects, we found that the largest number of categories of landscape painting subjects in extant landscape paintings and documentary records are found in the Five Dynasties and the Song Dynasty, followed by the Qing Dynasty and the Ming Dynasty, and the smallest number is found in the Yuan Dynasty.<sup>11</sup> From the perspective of documented data alone, it seems that the small numbers in the Yuan Dynasty were due to the short duration of the regime and the small number of surviving paintings and documented materials. From the results of the analysis of the paintings, it is clear that there are indeed very few categories of subject matter in Yuan dynasty landscape paintings, especially those by Ni Zan (倪瓚, 1301-1374), Huang Gongwang (黄公望, 1269-1354), and Wu Zhen (吴镇, 1280-1354), and the small number of categories in the images is well known. It seems that after *Endless River and Mountain*, there was no other masterpiece in Chinese landscape painting history that was comparable to it. However, Zhang Zeduan, a painter of the same period as Wang Ximeng, had a similar expositional character in his *Riverside Scene on the Qingming Day* except that the subject matter tended toward figures. Critics Zhang Huaibang (张怀邦)<sup>12</sup> pointed out that the purpose of painting was to understand the inner reasoning of things and to create with that knowledge. Only by knowing the inner truth of things could he reproduce the truth in depicting things, and even express the richness of the scene with very simple techniques and patterns.<sup>13</sup> The Northern Song court painter Guo Xi’s (郭熙, Circa 1000-1090)

*Linquan Gaozhi* (《林泉高致》) and Han Zhuo’s (韩拙, b. 1121) *Chunquan on Landscape Painting* (《山水纯全集》) both clearly state that artists must not only be knowledgeable but must also have a long and careful observation of the things they specialize in painting and be able to summarize their characteristics. Guo Ruoxu (郭若虚)<sup>14</sup>, a scholar of painting history in the Northern Song Dynasty, also believes that an artist must recognize the differences between flowers, fruits, grasses, trees, birds and animals in terms of the scenery of the four seasons, the names of their forms, and the nature of their movements and stops, in order to have a painting that matches the natural meaning.<sup>15</sup> It is also clearly recorded in the official historical archives that the Imperial Society conducted relevant education and examinations for painters. The Yuan Dynasty theorist Tang Hou’s (汤垕)<sup>16</sup> *Hua Jian* (《画鉴》) contains a story about Emperor Huizong’s request to his court painters to look at their subjects in detail and in-depth. He wrote: “(Emperor Huizong) once ordered the painters to paint the screen paintings of peacocks climbing the steps, but the emperor was not satisfied. So, he ordered all the other painters to paint, and presented his own paintings in turn. This time, some of the paintings were extremely strict and detailed, but the emperor was still not satisfied with them. So, the painters asked the emperor to tell them why they were wrong. The Word of the Emperor said, When the peacock goes up the steps, it must raise its left foot first, but what you have painted is the right foot. This was true, so the painters admired the emperor for his ability to Gewu so extensive and profound.”<sup>17</sup> Tang lived during the Yuan Dynasty, and it is impossible that he witnessed Emperor Huizong, so this story is doubtful but this incident is in line with the social concept at the time.

A more common explanation for the emphasis on the rational reproduction of forms in Song Dynasty landscape and flower-and-bird painting is the influence of the Neo-Confucian theory of “study things to acquire knowledge”. However, if we look at the trajectory of time, the rise and prosperity of landscape and flower-and-bird painting in the Song Dynasty was basically synchronized with the rise of Gewu ideas, while Neo-Confucianism was much later. The intersection of these two periods was in the late Northern Song Dynasty. At this time, Neo-Confucianism had just been formed and had little social influence. Moreover, it was forbidden to spread it because of its involvement in political struggles, so it could not influence the court painters in the late Northern and early Southern Song dynasties. It is certain that the Song Dynasty landscape paintings and flower-and-bird paintings pursued the artistic style



of rational reproduction under the influence of the concept of Gewu. However, this concept of Gewu was not the theory of Neo-Confucianism, but the theory of Xin Xue and Shu Xue, which they rejected. It is not Zhu Xi's "explore the nature of all things", but Su Shi's "learn more and know more". In terms of the representative forms of the culture of an era, landscape painting and flower-and-bird painting were the first peaks in the history of the Song Dynasty, and Neo-Confucianism was the highest achievement of philosophical thought in the Song Dynasty. As a result, historical events have been drastically abridged in simplified historical works, stating that the rise of landscape painting and flower-and-bird paintings was attributed to Neo-Confucianism. In addition, it also includes the deliberate construction of history and culture by Neo-Confucian scholars who hold the power of discourse.

Although there are also many categories of landscape painting subjects in the Ming and Qing dynasties, this is due to the increased number of painters in this period and a large number of paintings and documents that have survived to the present. It should be noted that during the Ming and Qing dynasties, the vast majority of painters were amateur painters such as bureaucrats and the gentry, who were keen on copying and imitating famous paintings from the Song, Yuan and Ming dynasties. During the early stages of learning to paint, they usually made facsimiles of the subject programs, recited the general knowledge of techniques, and directly copied the teacher's demonstration, basically not going to collect materials or sketch the scenery in person. At the same time, the court painters and folk painters also began to imitate the scholars and painters and learn their painting styles. As a result, the variety of subjects in Chinese painting became fewer and fewer, with landscape painters only painting the scenery around their residences, and flower-and-bird painters only painting plum, orchids, bamboo and chrysanthemums, or just one subject.

The change in identity of the artists had a major influence on the development of Chinese painting. The court painters and folk craftsmen were the main groups of painters in the Song Dynasty. They generally lacked Confucian literacy, and some masters had even become hawkers or soldiers. There are very few scholar-official painters, and the style of their paintings is very special. After the Yuan Dynasty, the major group of painters became the scholar-officials and the gentry, and drawing became self-cultivation in their private spaces. Even the court painters had profound Confucian training, while folk painters without Confucian status were excluded from the history of painting. This shift was

related to Zhao Mengfu (趙孟頫, 1254-1322) and his theory. He proposed that "the aesthetics of calligraphy and painting are the same, and that one should use the skills of calligraphy to paint." From the perspective of the painting's functionality, the scholars of the Song Dynasty were the demanders of the content of painting, while the scholars after the Yuan Dynasty were the creators of the content of painting. The former is viewing and acquiring, while the latter is creating and expressing. If it corresponds to the activity of self-cultivation, the former is to create a scene with the help of images to assist in self-cultivation, and the latter is to regulate the body and mind—self-cultivation directly in the process of drawing the painting. We know that since its birth, the purpose of landscape painting has not been to reproduce and cognize the real world, but by viewing landscape paintings one can appreciate the philosophy and pleasure which sages of past times have drawn from the landscape, the free flow of one's mind. Therefore, such encyclopedic paintings as *Endless River and Mountain* and *Riverside Scene on the Qingming Day* can only function for viewing, not for self-expression, much less for moral cultivation. This paradigm of painting disappeared with the decline of museum culture and was revived by the decline of Neo-Confucianism and the introduction of modern science. To a certain extent, we can also understand such phenomena as the esteem in which contemporary Song Dynasty painting was held, the fact that life drawing became a prerequisite and basis for the creation of paintings, that the variety of subjects in Chinese painting began to increase, and new and bizarre subjects emerged.

## 5. Conclusion

Iconology is a theoretical system for the study of European and American visual culture. Its theories and norms cannot be directly applied to the study of Chinese art as a template because of the great differences between Chinese and Western cultures. If we focus on the classification of images, the iconology that emerged during the Song Dynasty, such as the *Meihua Xishen Pu* (《梅花喜神譜》) and *Yunlin Shi Pu* (《雲林石譜》)<sup>18</sup>, is similar in form to that of the iconography. Moreover, lots of "Hua Pu" (the model books for Chinese paintings) published since the Qing Dynasty also laid the foundation of Chinese art pictorial history to a certain extent. However, due to the lack of intellectual structure and theoretical exploration of classification criteria, ancient iconology did not eventually develop into a systematic art theory and method. Today, with the rapid

globalization of culture, the collection, classification, the matic annotation, and genealogical combing of images is an urgent task, both from the perspective of cross-cultural art communication and from the perspective of the construction and development of Chinese visual culture itself. A small advance in basic research may lead to a major breakthrough in the theoretical application. If we only focus on the work of iconography itself, it is very boring, uninteresting, and unworthy, but if we relate it to the history of painting and the history of ideas its uses and value will be highlighted.

Hangzhou Normal University

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WANG PING, received Ph.D. degree from China Academy of Art. He is a professor of Fine Arts School at the Hangzhou Normal University, China. His research interests are Chinese landscape painting, Chinese art ideology and digitization method for Iconography.

Editor: Liu Kexin

## ENDNOTES

1. In the collection catalogue of the Palace Museum and the works of a few Western art historians, the *Qianli Jiangshan Tu* (《千里江山圖》) has been translated as *A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains*. This translation would be seriously misleading to understand for the general audience, and this article is translated as *Endless River and Mountain* based on the theme of the painting.

2. In the collection catalogue of the Palace Museum, *Qingming Shanghe Tu* (《清明上河圖》) has been translated as *Life Along the Bian River at the Pure Brightness Festival*. This painting depicts flourishing and bustling scenes along the Bian Canal and around the southeast gate of Bianjing (modern day Kaifeng), the capital of the Northern Song dynasty.

3. Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press Co. *Key Concepts in Chinese Thought and Culture*, [online] Available at: <[https://www.chinesethought.cn/EN/shuyu\\_show.aspx?shuyu\\_id=2246](https://www.chinesethought.cn/EN/shuyu_show.aspx?shuyu_id=2246)> [Accessed 14 February 2023].

4. *Han Dian*. 格物. *Han Dian*, [online] Available at: <<https://www.zdic.net/hans/格物>> [Accessed 16 February 2023].

5. Lao Sze-kwang. *New Chinese Philo-*

*sophy History (Vol. 3)*. Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press. 2005, pp. 53-56.

6. Lao Sze-kwang. *An Annotation to Daxue and Zhongyong*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press. 2000, p. 3.

7. Liu Zhi Qing. *From Zhinan Mount to Tanxun Lake: Reflections on Chinese Knowledge, Thought and Religion*. Taipei: WanJuanLou Books Co. 2019, pp. 35-42.

8. (Song Dynasty) Li Jingde, Wang Xingxian (ed.). *Zhu Zi YuLei* (《朱子語類》). Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company. 1986.

9. Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press Co. *Key Concepts in Chinese Thought and Culture*, [online] Available at: <[https://www.chinesethought.cn/EN/shuyu\\_show.aspx?shuyu\\_id=4253](https://www.chinesethought.cn/EN/shuyu_show.aspx?shuyu_id=4253)> [Accessed 18 February 2023].

10. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

11. Wang Ping & Mao Jianbo. (2019). Database-based Chinese Landscape Painting "Theme" Research. *New Arts*. 7, pp. 6-10.

12. Zhang Huaibang lived in late Northern Song Dynasty but his origins remain obscure.

13. (Song dynasty) Zhang Huaibang. *Postface to the Chunquan's Landscape The-*

*ory*. Harbin: Northern Literature and Arts Publishing House. 2021, p. 28.

14. Guo Ruoxu, Aristocrats of early Song Dynasty. In 1071, he was the official position of receiving the special envoy of the Liao Dynasty, but his origins remain obscure.

15. (Song dynasty) Guo Ruoxu. *Tuhua Jianwen Zhi*. Beijing: People's Fine Arts Publishing House. 2005, p. 10.

16. Tang Hou lived mainly in the Yuan dynasty, but his origins remain obscure. He was specializing in the examination of ancient events and discussing painting theory with the great scholar Ke Jiushi (柯九思, 1290-1343) in the capital of the Yuan dynasty in 1328.

17. (Yuan dynasty) Tang Hou. *Hua Jian*, in Ma Cai (ed.). Beijing: People's Arts Publishing House. 1959, p. 15.

18. The book engraved in the Southern Song Dynasty (1118-1133), it is the most complete and informative collection of ornamental stone properties, colors, textures, origins, uses, and aesthetic values in ancient China. It is the most complete collection of woodcut prints and drawings of ancient China.

## 圖像修身：格物思想對山水畫題材演化的影響

王平

**摘要：**本文通過對宋代山水畫《千里江山圖》中題材的採集、分類與譜系梳理，發現這幅中國繪畫史上題材的物種類別最豐富的山水畫，繪制的時代恰恰是中國「博物文化」發展的頂峰，明德的展現了儒學博物式「格物」的方法。同時，在這一研究案例中我們意識到，圖像志研究或者說美術圖像中題材、主題的採集、分類、注釋和索引工作，僅從圖像志工作本身來看，它枯燥、無趣又沒有意義，但是與繪畫史、思想史關聯，其意義與價值就會突顯出來。

**關鍵詞：**圖像學；圖像志；題材；格物；山水畫