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The Private Character of Natural Beauty: *Shanshui* Painting as a Model for Unity of Self and Natural Environment

David Adam Brubaker

Abstract

How can each of us develop an aesthetic appreciation of nature as our home and not a resource to be exploited? Chen Wangheng answers that environmental beauty provides a sense of home through a unity of subject and object that belongs to the private character of the natural environment. But how is the display of the natural environment private? To uphold Chen's remarks, I inspect the model of *shanshui* (山水 mountain-water) painting, as Chen suggests. I find that the private character of the natural environment and the related element *zhi* (質 substance) in *shanshui* painting cannot be described in the object-oriented languages of pragmatism and analytic philosophy. To translate *zhi*, I use Merleau-Ponty's term '*le visible*' (the visible). As a result, Chen's analysis of natural beauty and the unity of the human and nature in *shanshui* painting can be communicated. I show how *shanshui* paintings by Jizi express the unification of the individual person with nature. Chen revolutionizes environmental aesthetics with an alternative paradigm for human contact with nature.

Key Words

Bifa Ji; Chinese environmental aesthetics; Jizi; Merleau-Ponty; *shanshui* (山水); texture of the visible; Chen Wangheng; *zhi* (質)

1. Reanimation of natural environment

Given concerns now about ecological imbalance, we have an urgent need to revitalize the appreciation of natural environment so that nature is no longer perceived materially as a set of objects of relative worth to be used and exploited. One way forward is to develop an aesthetics of environment that explains how a particular human being acquires an awareness of self as inseparable from nature, where the difference or distance between human interiority and objective environment is dissolved. Within environmental aesthetics, two models for such a unity stand out. The first is Arnold Berleant's model of sensory immersion and active engagement with nature that produces a perceptual unity of the human and nature.^[1] The second is Chen Wangheng's use of traditional Chinese philosophy to articulate an appreciation of natural beauty. Chen holds that the appreciation of natural beauty depends on an individual person's direct observation of the unity of subject and object that leads to an awareness of living in happiness, the highest good, and a sense of being at home in and inseparable from nature.^[2] Both authors agree that the tradition of Chinese mountain and water (山水 *shanshui*) painting is a model for producing awareness of the unification of self with nature.

However, there is a fundamental difference. Chen uses a personal example of his looking to situate natural beauty and the unity of human being and nature within an apparent place that he explicitly calls “*my environment*” and “the private character of natural environment.”^[3] By contrast, Berleant calls for us to drop terms that obscure, such as ‘inner self,’ in favor of language for the active engagement of perception with the world of physical conditions. Thus, here the topic of immediate interest is the genuine incommensurability that arises between the languages of these two authors, both colleagues in search for harmony with nature and ecological balance.

With this paper, I outline and uphold Chen’s claim that the appreciation of natural beauty arises from the unity of subject and object, as well as his statement that the individual person observes this unity within the context of the private character of the natural environment. According to Chen’s aesthetics, natural beauty is exhibited in a display of the natural world that is private to the individual person. Since it is private, I infer that this character is not named in Berleant’s eloquent and moving catalogue of successive objects of experience that compose what he refers to as the perceptual unity of the human being and the physical environment. Consequently, Chen’s contribution turns environmental aesthetics into a laboratory for comparative philosophy, a site for cross-cultural analysis, and a forum for evaluating competing cultural models for the unity of subject and object. The result is momentous for environmental aesthetics and audiences in China and abroad.

This essay proceeds in five primary steps. In Section 2, I outline the connection that Chen Wangheng makes between natural beauty and the individual person’s awareness of the private character of natural environment. Chen describes different modes for appreciating natural environment. It can be appreciated scientifically for perceptual experiences of physical conditions, or aesthetically for a private character that is doubtful and indescribable as a perceived object. What is the origin of this private character? Some stimulus without? Some feeling within? Some unifying display that is midway between objective physical existence and interior feeling?

With Section 3, I take up the premise that *shanshui* painting is a model for the unity of the human and nature. I inspect *Bifa Ji*, the tenth-century text of traditional Chinese aesthetics attributed to Jing Hao. Does Jing Hao ascribe a similar interior or private character to the painter’s observations of natural environment? Yes. Given recent scholarship, it can be argued that Jing Hao regards a painting of mountains and waters as *shanshui* only after it includes an image that shows *zhi* (質), an element internal to the individual person that is essential for producing a unifying resonance with a particular natural landscape. The term *zhi* occurs in language; therefore, its referent is not completely indescribable and not entirely ineffable. The referent is observable. But it is also inward and not an object experienced in common through perceptual understanding. How is this term to be translated for appreciation by global audiences?

In Section 4, I argue that neither descriptions of the private character of natural environment nor the term *zhi* can be

translated into object-oriented Euro-American philosophies of art and environment. An object-oriented language of appreciation can never articulate how an object is inseparable from subject, or how an object perceived within a surrounding natural environment is inseparable from a private display that is revealed only to the individual person. Thus, we have two competing cultural paradigms for the individual person's contact with nature: the model of *perceptual unity*, and the model of unity by *the private character* of natural environment, or by display of a *private interior*. Fortunately, Thomas Kuhn describes a strategy for ending such cases of incommensurability. Individuals prone to Euro-American habits can choose to look from their own respective cases for some sign of what the painter Jing Hao may mean by the term *zhi* or of what Chen may mean by the private character of natural environment.^[4]

Fifth, in considering the two paradigms for contact with nature, we may ask if any philosophers in Euro-American language communities have initiated the steps for resolution outlined by Kuhn. Are there any signs that Euro-American cultures are up to the task? Yes. Merleau-Ponty's final writings on the philosophy of the visible (*le visible*) describe an interior principle with many of the same features that Jing Hao assigns to *zhi*. For example, both terms, *zhi* and *le visible*, refer to an interior display that is noticed in the absence of distracting perceptual experiences of objects. By translating *zhi* as it relates to the texture of the visible, I affirm Chen's claim that displays of natural environment have a private character and Jing Hao's claim that *zhi*, shown in an image of the visible, anchors the emotional resonance of an artwork to nature.

In the sixth step, after substituting "the visible" for *zhi*, I interpret several ink paintings by Jizi (Wang Yunshan, 1941-2015). I argue that Jizi's *Field of Soul No 1* (2013) is *shanshui* because he creates an image of *zhi* by using bright pink to highlight a visible interior that animates a private display of a particular natural environment. In keeping with Chen's remarks, this painting is continuous with the *shanshui* tradition and a model both for the unity of subject and object and for cultivating a sense of home.

These steps uphold Chen's claims about the private character of the natural environment and the role of traditional Chinese painting as a means for conveying the unity of individual human being and nature. The interpretation offered here for the aesthetics of *shanshui* painting supports Chen in his assertion that the traditional Chinese principle *tian ren he yi* (天人合一) is a guide for attributing a private character to the display of a natural environment noticed by the individual human being.

2. Unification: the private character of natural environment

Chen Wangheng develops a descriptive aesthetics for his own case of looking upon the natural beauty of the environment surrounding him. He points out that such a descriptive aesthetics differs from the discourses of philosophy and science, because it refers to the scale of nature as the particular person directly witnesses it. Scientific discourse expresses general concepts and refers to particular types;

philosophical reflection remains "an abstraction that stands for the whole of humankind."^[5]

Activating a third mode of aesthetic language, he refers to the private character of the natural environment, as he sits and looks out the window at the blue sky and feels the warmth of the sunshine. The connection that Chen makes between his own looking and the private character of natural environment is central to my investigation. In this regard, the paragraph below has special significance:

The aesthetic conception of the environment relates in some ways to both the philosophical and scientific spheres. Yet there are sizable differences. From the aesthetic perspective, the beauty of the natural environment is always perceived by a particular individual. The aesthetic object, for instance 'nature' as perceived, is therefore limited in scale and range by the perceiving subject. Let us take a personal experience as an example. When sitting in my room typing, I can see through the window a small, albeit lush wood and a corner of blue sky; I can feel the pleasant warmth of the sunshine and hear the melodious songs of birds. This is *my* environment as well as *my* aesthetic object. The private character of that environment is such that its identity as an environment may be questionable.^[6]

This passage illustrates the double-aspect that nature displays to the individual person. Chen looks upon external environment and experiences particular objects according to type (birds, heat, wood, sky), yet the same scene is a private display ("my environment") that begins to lose its status as a perceptual unity of distinct objects belonging to experiences of the public world. He fits natural environment into the particular scale and range of the human individual, that is, into a private dimension. In this way, he creates an aesthetics of looking at natural environment that belongs neither to conventional philosophy nor to scientific knowledge.

Chen's description of natural beauty differs from Berleant's, though there are many similarities. Berleant gives eloquent descriptions of how immersion in the natural environment reveals a boundlessness "that is the ultimately ungraspable breadth of nature," and he adds that the "cognitive relation to things is not the exclusive relation or even the highest one we can achieve."^[7] But it seems to me that he does not connect non-cognitive acquaintance with the ungraspable breadth of nature back to the private character of the particular natural environment that is "my environment," as Chen would put it. By connecting the ineffability of natural environment back to the private character of environment witnessed by the individual person, Chen's account is continuous with the one-world view expressed in Chinese philosophy, namely, the view that "the existence of everything is connected with the existence of human beings; hence, being cannot be separated from the existence of human beings."^[8]

However, Chen does not settle the origin of the private character of natural environment. Does the private character

consist of feeling? Or does it arise from a private display? To develop answers, I reach out from Chen's account in search for similarities in the aesthetic language that Jing Hao uses to instruct painters in the creation of images that resonate with the vitality of nature.

3. *Shanshui* painting: *Zhi* and resonance with environment

What can be done to clarify the place or source of the private character that Chen Wangheng attributes to natural environment and the unity between the human and nature? Given the premise that *shanshui* painting is a model for the cultivation of natural beauty, I turn to the language of Jing Hao's *Bifa Ji* for signs that the individual person's contact with the natural environment occurs through a private or interior display, not through perceptions of objects in the public world of common understanding. I find that *Bifa Ji* refers to images that display *zhi*, an element internal or private to the individual person. Images of this kind are essential to creating a resonance with nature and an awareness of the unity of the human and natural environment. This awareness of unity is *not* the result of the display of forms or patterns that resemble objects perceived to exist in nature.

According to dialogue in *Bifa Ji*, the painter has two ways of looking at nature. The painter can look at the natural environment for the purpose grasping the flower or shape (華 *hua*) of a thing, or for the purpose of grasping the fruit or essential substance (實 *shi*) of a thing.

One sizes up the image of a thing and from that seizes upon what is authentic in it. If it is the visible pattern [華 *hua*] of a thing – seize its visible pattern, if it is the essential substance [實 *shi*, fruit] of the thing – seize its essential substance. One cannot seize on visible pattern and make it essential substance.[9]

The painter may choose to grasp or perceive the flower (that is, distinct shapes, patterns, and motions), or to grasp or notice the fruit or essential substance directly displayed in a particular natural environment revealed by looking. But perception of forms, patterns, and objects in a natural environment is never equivalent to observing the display of fruit or substance. It follows that the painter needs to observe the fruit manifest in a natural environment in some other way than by perception of forms or patterns in human experience.

Continuing, Jing Hao adds that the painter can create images of two kinds, one for each way of noticing the natural environment. One technique produces an image of forms and patterns that resembles objects and things perceived in nature by the first mode of looking. The second technique results in an image that is authentic, alive, and true to the vitality of the natural environment. It is images of this second, authentic sort, never images of objects, that create a resonance with the vitality of nature and a sense of kinship between the human and natural life as a whole. If one has skills to paint forms and patterns of things, and if one lacks the second technique for painting the observable substance, then one can squeeze out a likeness but never an image that resonates with the vitality

and charm that is shown by nature as a whole.

If one does not know this technique [for making an authentic image of the fruit] one can perhaps squeeze out a likeness [似 *si*], but the representation of authenticity [真 *zhen*] can never be attained.[10]

This is a most fundamental point. If images of distinct things in human experience are never authentic, then the second sort of image, the one authentically conveying the vitality of nature and the fruit displayed within a direct look at a natural environment, can never be merely about things in human visual perception. So, the kinship of the individual human being with nature is never revealed by images that represent objects perceptually experienced in a particular natural environment.

What is an authentic image then? How does the painter make one, according to Jing Hao? If showing an object of visual perception does not produce a resonance with the vitality of a natural environment, what does? The painter-sage replies:

Authenticity [真 *zhen*] is when vital energy [氣 *qi*] and essence [質 *zhi*] are both abundant.[11]

In other words, when the painter uses a technique that passes *qi* through *zhi*, the result is an image that is authentic and productive of the awareness of the unity of the individual person and natural environment. But the image that displays recognizable objects is lifeless. Evidently, since images of things never qualify as images of *zhi*, it is by interspersing images of *zhi* strategically within or between lifeless images of forms and patterns that the painter produces a painting that is *shanshui* or expressive of the atmosphere of life as a whole and of the kinship of the human and nature.

What then does the term *zhi* denote? Scholarship abroad on *Bifa Ji* suggests that *zhi* has a double-aspect. Some scholars emphasize kinship with natural objects or physical phenomena, while others emphasize some non-objective connection with the interiority of the painter or onlooker. Stephen West translates *zhi* as "physical essence of an object," in his comments on *Bifa Ji*.^[12] This fits the idea that images showing *zhi* create a resonance by directing awareness to the fruit, or substance, manifest in a direct look at a natural environment. Yet there is also a deeper context. For example, Stephen Owen writes about the painter who chooses to create the second and very different sort of image: "this *xiang* is 'appearance' in a deeper sense than *si*, a mode of 'appearance' that leads the deliberative painter to grasp the 'substance' (*shi*, fruit) as well as the 'flower,' *hua*."^[13] The private aspect of *zhi* is implied when Owen states that *zhi* is an *internal* term; he uses the phrase "interior terms such as 'substance,' *shi* [實], 'material,' *zhi* [質], and *qi*."^[14] Thus the term *zhi*, sometimes translated as 'substance,' refers to something alongside physical objects that the individual person experiences in nature; but it also refers to the interior of the person that is never experienced as a public object. This double-aspect is an opportunity, not a defect. It suggests that the term *zhi* designates a context that is well-suited as a pivot for showing how external objects are inseparable from a private interiority noticed by the individual person.^[15]

Thus, we discover a match between Chen Wangheng's contemporary aesthetics of environment and the traditional Chinese aesthetics of *zhi*. The private character of a particular natural environment displayed in the individual person's looking is not due merely to feeling. It is also due to the display of an unusual element, such as *zhi*, that accompanies the individual person's visual experiences of objects. Thus, as Chen notes, looking at the natural environment is never separate from the private or interior character of the individual person's own environment. The double aspect of *zhi* suggests that Jing Hao and Chen Wangheng do belong to one continuous tradition of Chinese aesthetics.

4. Incommensurability: *zhi* and object languages

It follows that Chen Wangheng and Jing Hao participate in a language of aesthetics that has no translation in philosophies that describe direct acquaintance with nature in terms of perceptual experiences of objects within a particular natural environment. Descriptions of a perceptual unity of experiences of public objects mention neither the private aspect of natural environment nor the interior referent designated by *zhi*. The language of *zhi* within *shanshui* aesthetics is used to denote an element that resonates with a display of a particular natural environment that is noticed as fruit and not in terms of forms and objects. Thus the language of Chinese aesthetics is incommensurate with Kant's high-modern language that defines nature in terms of objects of relative worth that are obtained by the actions of the individual human being.^[16]

The language of traditional Chinese aesthetics also appears to be genuinely incommensurate with the language of American pragmatism. For example, John Dewey suggests that the "material out of which a work of art is composed belongs to the common world rather than to the self" and that "[t]he material expressed cannot be private; that is the state of the madhouse."^[17] This resistance to a descriptive aesthetics for what is private may be one consideration that motivates Berleant's reluctance to use any language that refers to an inner self. Bertrand Russell concedes in *Problems of Philosophy* that there is, of course, an *apparent space* exhibited to each of us privately. But he quickly backtracks and notes that the scientist, a guide for the analytic philosopher, finds it uninteresting. If *zhi* is an internal term, as Owen notes, then *shanshui* painting is about making art with a private element of design that creates a resonance with the private character of the natural environment revealed when the individual person takes a look. Since the *shanshui* painter uses technique to minimize forms and patterns of things so that *zhi* can be shown off for better effect, the object-oriented language of American pragmatism never names what Stephen Owen refers to as the level of appearing that is deeper than that of the appearances of forms, shapes, and objects registered within perceptual understanding. The framework of pragmatism abandons the project, kept alive by Chen, it seems to me, of describing how experiences of objects appear within in the private or interior character of the natural environment that is displayed in a look belonging to the particular individual person.

It can also be argued that analytic philosophy has no language capable of explaining the resonance with nature that *shanshui*

paintings are about. Arthur Danto describes the meanings of any given artwork as embodied by, or embedded within, material counterparts and things.^[18] He does not describe how material things are privately displayed to the individual person. So Danto has, it seems to me, no terms available for translating the meaning of *zhi*, a term that *shanshui* painters, such as Jing Hao, have used for centuries to refer to images that are true to an observable aspect of the natural environment that is never noticed at those moments when the individual human chooses to activate perception for the grasping of recognizable forms, shapes, patterns, or material objects. Liu Yuedi has good reason to suggest that analytic philosophy is blind to or incapable of registering the difference that traditional Chinese philosophy is now introducing into the global aesthetics of art and the environment.^[19] The abundance of *zhi* in the authentic sort of image needed to make a *shanshui* painting cannot be expressed in the language of material counterparts that Danto uses in his analytic definition of art.

The incommensurability outlined here is nothing new. What has changed now is that *shanshui* aesthetics, which has often been dismissed as a pre-modern anomaly or else suppressed as not in keeping with scientific knowledge of the world of things, is now interesting to professional curators, artists, and philosophers in China who are seeking to contribute to the creation of an unprecedented set of global values suitable for challenges today. Philosophers such as Chen Wangheng take traditional *shanshui* painting, which uses images to create an emotional resonance with the vitality of nature and the private character of some particular natural environment, as a model and resource for a twenty-first-century aesthetics of environment that may provide an antidote to the overemphasis on materialism during the twentieth century.

Fortunately, there is a strategy for ending this incommensurability. Thomas Kuhn suggests a path, when the language of one community is incommensurate with that of another community. Each side needs to give up the thought that the statements of the other are mad or anomalous. A solution arises by taking the difference between the language of one's own group and that of another group as a subject of study. He continues, "Each may, that is, try to discover what the other would see and say when presented with a stimulus to which his own verbal response would be different."^[20] So individuals shaped mainly by modern Euro-American attitudes can start by accepting that Jing Hao uses an interior term for an observable context of the natural environment. The solution is for individual members of pragmatist and analytic communities of philosophy to look personally at their own respective particular natural environments for some sign that gives meaning to what Jing Hao, the *shanshui* painter, means by *zhi*, or what Chen Wangheng means by "the private character of environment."

5. Translation for *zhi*: texture of the visible

Are there any signs that philosophers within Euro-American communities have changed their paradigm of the individual person's contact with nature? Is there some alternative now to the late-modern practice of describing contact with nature

solely in terms of experiences of objects or processes? Specifically, is there some fledgling language within European philosophy that compares well with Chen Wangheng's claim about the private character of natural environment and with Jing Hao's use of *zhi* to name an element that is both internal to the person and observed during a look at images that are true to the vitality of nature? Yes. Maurice Merleau-Ponty appears to have already developed in 1960-61 a language for an interior principle of the visible that invites two different interpretations, as is the case with the interior term *zhi*. By sketching out Merleau-Ponty's use of *le visible*, we can judge its suitability as a term of translation for *zhi* and the private character of the natural environment. His language does not improve Chen's account or Jing Hao's aesthetic; instead, it is a means for *communicating* the principles of traditional Chinese aesthetics to audiences inside and outside China. Merleau-Ponty's language shows that European cultures do have an alternative paradigm for contact with nature ready and waiting.^[21]

How similar is the interior principle of the visible to the human interior denoted by the term *zhi*? There are at least three features that *zhi* and the visible have in common, and these suggest that "the visible" is a good candidate as a term for translations. Both terms refer to an interiority of an individual person that is observable to that person alone. Both designate a unifying context that is reversible or subject to two interpretations; one and the same context is noticed as natural environment and as a private display not directly accessible to others. Both designate a referent that is not named in the tradition of European philosophy.

By observing nature as the painter does, Merleau-Ponty notices the visible as a texture or general atmosphere that persists, even as visual perceptions of particular forms, structures, and patterns come and go. Particular colors, shapes, or objects emerge from a more general context about which it is possible to speak. We might even say that he uses the term 'visible' in a descriptive aesthetics for a context or first-dimension that precedes the perception of objects and properties attributed to the real world. Merleau-Ponty reports that the particular red that he sees requires a focusing or a fixing within a more general redness. He characterizes this context with the words *texture* and *atmosphérique*. The temporary perception of a form is always bound up with a general atmosphere:

And now that I have fixed [this red], if my eyes penetrate into it, into its fixed structure, or if they start to wander round about again, the quale resumes its *atmospheric* existence. Its precise form is bound up with a certain woolly, metallic, or porous [?] configuration or *texture*, and the quale itself counts for very little compared with these participations.^[22]

It follows that the context of the individual person's own look at a natural environment always includes a case of this more general pre-perceptual atmosphere within which perception temporarily fixes experiences of particular objects or properties. This atmosphere or texture, called 'the visible,' is inseparable from the individual human seer: "he who sees

cannot possess the visible unless he is possessed by it, unless he is of it, unless...he is one of the visibles, capable, by a singular reversal, of seeing them – he who is one of them.”[23] The seer is caught up and always unified with what is seen, in the sense that vision is a narcissism: “the seer and visible reciprocate one another and we no longer know which sees and which is seen.”[24] Again, Merleau-Ponty characterizes the visible as private: “The superficial pellicle of the visible is only for my vision and my body.”[25] The private display of the texture and atmosphere of the visible, which one, as seer, finds inseparable from oneself, “has no name in traditional philosophy to designate it.”[26] It is neither something material nor something spiritual or mental. It is nonetheless essential to the individual seer and best described by the term “element,” since it is a “general thing, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea.”[27] The difference between the element of the visible and the perception of pattern and structure is evident in Merleau-Ponty’s claim that the person who looks privately can always notice the grain and texture of the animating element of the visible that persists throughout alterations in figure.[28]

Moreover, Merleau-Ponty describes how the painter crafts an art object so that it references the private dimension of the visible that is inseparable from the seer. As early as 1960, he cites Paul Cézanne, Henri Matisse, and Henry Moore who create works of art that emphasize the visible dimension essential to the individual person who looks. He describes how Matisse uses line so that it is neither an imitation or likeness of a thing nor a thing; it is not, I take it, an exemplar of physical object-hood. Instead, it serves as a filament for a hollow that opens up within the white paper: “It is a certain hollow opened up within the in-itself, a certain constitutive emptiness – an emptiness which, Moore’s statues show decisively, sustains the supposed positivity of space...”[29] The message is clear: Some artists have techniques for creating images of emptiness that show the interior element of the visible.

Using this language, we may say that the *shanshui* painter uses technique to ensure that a painting emphasizes the texture of the visible or *zhi*. Like the hollow of the visible in Matisse’s pen and ink drawings, a painter such as Jing Hao creates images of *zhi*, or the texture of the visible, and these resonate with the texture of the visible that the painter has noticed earlier in the display of a particular natural environment. This study of Merleau-Ponty enables us to say that a natural environment has a private character whenever the individual person looks at it, since the experiences of a natural environment will always occur within the texture of the visible that the individual person brings to a case of observation. Appreciation of a private feature of environment is inseparable from noticing the texture of the visible that is essential to the individual person’s awareness of self-existence.

To summarize, since Chen Wangheng accepts *shanshui* painting as a model for acquiring awareness of the unity of the human and the natural environment, we can confirm the fruitfulness of his account of natural beauty and of the unity of subject and object by translating the character *zhi* according to meanings suggested by the term “visible.” Like Merleau-Ponty, Chen uses the example of his own case of looking to

thoroughly investigate details of the individual person's own contact with the natural environment. Chen notices that the natural environment exhibits a private character, and this enables him to say, when he perceives specific birds and temperatures of sunlight, that "[t]his is my environment." Similarly, Merleau-Ponty reports that as soon as he takes his perception of the Ponte de la Concord as evidence for the conviction that he inhabits "the natural world and the historical world," he has the equally strong conviction that "this vision is *mine*."^[30] By that he means that the perceptual experience of the bridge depends upon the innate and secret texture of the visible, a general atmosphere that, taken as an observable whole and without regard to the perception of objects, is a display of his own home in nature. Thus we have additional support for Chen's claim that there is a private character attached to any particular natural environment observed by the human individual. So there is reason to prefer his paradigm for the individual person's own direct contact with nature to a paradigm that emphasizes perceptual unity but does not refer explicitly to the private character of the natural environment.

6. Jizi and Dao of Ink: Dao, the invisible and nature

Chen Wangheng claims that *shanshui* painting is a model for the appreciation of natural beauty and the unity of the human and nature. According to our results, authenticity is when the artist uses some technique to clothe visible texture, to show it off, so that the individual person may begin to aesthetically appreciate it as an interior element that displays the unification of self with nature. The ink paintings of Jizi are valuable at this time because they lend cultural support to Chen's account of natural beauty. Do Jizi's paintings confirm that some private aspect of the natural environment produces a unification that dissolves the separateness of subject and object? Are his paintings still *shanshui*? If they are *shanshui*, then his compositions show authentic images of *zhi*, as specified in *Bifa Ji*.

Wang Duanting asserts that Jizi's art is disconnected from *shanshui* painting: "His paintings are not landscapes, and they are not *shanshui*; instead, they deal in time and space. In traditional Chinese painting, this latitude does not exist. In particular, the concept of time in Chinese paintings does not exist; the imagery is static."^[31] Wang Duanting suggests that Jizi's paintings show the influence of Surrealism and Futurism, and it is undeniable that some of Jizi's paintings show images of eyes, sweeping diagonals, or swirls of energy. The question is this: Do some parts of Jizi's paintings show that he still maintains a connection with the aesthetics of Jing Hao?



Fig. 1. Jizi, *Clean World* (2007) Courtesy of Jizi.



Fig. 2. Jizi *Dao of Ink Series No. 10* (2009) Courtesy of Jizi.

Using the translation developed here for *zhi*, I conclude that Jizi maintains connection with the text of *Bifa Ji*. He is still careful to include authentic images that resonate with the vitality of nature and show the unity of the human and the natural environment. While his paintings sometimes show nature as having a larger, more cosmic dimension, he often adds one or more fragments that exhibit interior displays of the visible. For example, *Clean World* (2007) (Fig. 1) presents a disk that displays an interior image of scenery, and the display is self-enclosed in a way that turns the interior into an artistic representation of the beholder's own private and unique contact with nature. The geometric disk enclosing the interior visible surface becomes more biomorphic in *Dao of Ink Series No. 10* (2009) (Fig. 2). To give a third example, Jizi creates *Field of Soul Series-Limitless World No 1* (2013) (Fig. 3) with a fragment displaying a vivid pink interior dimension that animates perceptions of handmade lines and shapes that resemble the physical forms of traditional Chinese domestic architecture. The pink interior of this floating fragment becomes evidence for concluding that this painting remains connected with Jing Hao's call for images of *zhi* that resonate with the vitality of nature.



Fig. 3. Jizi, *Field of Soul Series - Limitless World No 1* (2013)
Courtesy of Jizi.

7. Aesthetic revolution

Given the investigation here, several conclusions stand out. First, Chen Wangheng's account of the private character of a particular natural environment observed by the individual person is a promising path for environmental aesthetics today. Chinese aesthetics is well equipped to describe the private character of the individual person's contact with particular cases of the natural environment. Use of the term "zhi" and the term "texture of the visible" to describe contact with nature is a change in culture and paradigm for many. There does appear to be a revolution, of sorts, in global aesthetics already in process. Arthur Danto anticipates it. Chen Wangheng foresees it, as he applies Chinese aesthetics to enliven a global aesthetics of environment: "A great mission lies in front of us, and the time is coming for an aesthetic revolution."^[32] Jizi's paintings can be interpreted as evidence of a growing cultural awareness that is now circulating globally. However, as I have noted, this paradigm of private contact suggested in Chen Wangheng's environmental aesthetics can emerge institutionally only after agreement to break away from strict adherence to the conventions of late-modern Euro-American discourses of art and environment. It is a mistake to dismiss automatically any account of personal contact with nature that is not expressed in terms of material events or objects of perceptual experience.

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Endnotes

[1] Arnold Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment* (Philadelphia: Temple, 1992), p. 19.

[2] Wangheng Chen, *Chinese Environmental Aesthetics*, trans. Feng Su, ed. Gerald Cipriani (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 5.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 114.

[4] Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), pp. 97-203.

[5] Wangheng Chen, *Chinese Environmental Aesthetics*, p. 114.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 114.

[7] Arnold Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment*, p. 236.

[8] Li Zehou and Jane Cauvel, *Four Essays on Aesthetics* (Lanham: Lexington, 2006), p. 40.

[9] Stephen West, "Bi fa ji, Jing Hao, 'Notes on the Method for the Brush,'" in *Ways With Words*, eds. Pauline Yu, et. al. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), p. 204.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 204.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 204.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 204.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 214.

[14] Stephen Owen, "BI FA JI," *Ways With Words*, p. 217. I take Owen to claim that the painter has two modes of appearance to choose from when looking at a particular natural environment: the first is based on likeness (似 *si*) and results in the grasping of the flower or shape (華 *hua*); the second results in grasping the fruit or essential substance (實 *shi*). For commentators today, one question is this: what is the painter's basis for grasping authentically the essential substance on display in a particular natural environment if not the grasping of shape, form or pattern?

[15] For more on the double aspect of *zhi* (質 substance), see Jonathan Hay, *Sensuous Surfaces* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, 2010), p. 92: "In Ming-Qing China, material in a mundane sense (*cai*) had a metaphysical counterpart in substance (*zhi*)."

[16] Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1959), p. 46.

[17] John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Penguin, 1934), p. 112.

[18] See Arthur Danto, *What Art Is* (New Haven: Yale, 2013), p. 149.

[19] Liu Yuedi, "Chinese Contemporary Art," in *Subversive Strategies in Contemporary Chinese Art*, eds. Mary Bittner

Wiseman and Liu Yuedi (Leiden: Brill, 2011), p. 73.

[20] Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, p. 201.

[21] See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonse Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 200: "The problems posed in *Ph. P* are insoluble because I start there from the 'consciousness'-'object' distinction." This signals that he has moved to a different paradigm for direct acquaintance with nature. Merleau-Ponty's paradigm of the reversibility of the visible is a break from phenomenology.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 132. Italics mine.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 135.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 139.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 138.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 139.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 139.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 205.

[29] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader, Philosophy and Painting*, ed. Galen A. Johnson, trans. Michael Smith (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), p. 144.

[30] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 5.

[31] See Wang Duanting, "Philosophical Reflections on Contemporary Ink and the Jizi Solo Exhibition Symposium," in *Jizi-When Spirituality Becomes Form* (Suzhou: Suzhou Jinji Lake Art Museum, 2015), p. 324.

[32] Wangheng Chen, *Chinese Environmental Aesthetics*, p. 121.