

Article type:
Original Research

Faculty of international Art, Krirk University, Thailand

Corresponding author email address: 1049564811@qq.com

Philosophy in Ink: Mei Qing's Integration of Form and Spiritual Conception in Landscape Painting

Li. Rui



Article history:

Received 12 Jul 2025
Revised 28 Jul 2025
Accepted 20 Sep 2025
Published online 01 Oct 2025

How to cite this article:

Rui, L. (2025). Philosophy in Ink: Mei Qing's Integration of Form and Spiritual Conception in Landscape Painting. International Journal of Body, Mind and Culture, 12(7), 5-12.



© 2025 the authors. This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) License.

ABSTRACT

Objective: This study investigates the unique visual philosophy of Mei Qing, a pivotal painter of the Ming–Qing transition, by analyzing how his landscape representations of Huangshan reflect a synthesis of formal innovation, literati aesthetics, and spiritual symbolism.

Methods and Materials: Using a qualitative visual analysis approach, the study examines Mei Qing's key landscape works, focusing on compositional elements, brush techniques, symbolic use of form, and their philosophical implications. Primary attention is given to works such as Tiandu Peak, Alchemy Table, and Lotus Peak. The analysis is contextualized through Daoist, Buddhist, and literati frameworks.

Findings: Mei Qing's landscapes combine layered brushwork, spatial abstraction, and symbolic references to create poetic visual meditations. Huangshan is depicted not merely as a geographic location, but as a metaphysical space of solitude, elevation, and self-transcendence. Techniques such as negative space, asymmetry, and expressive voids reflect Daoist notions of non-being and spiritual detachment. The works are found to challenge representational norms and prioritize emotional resonance and philosophical contemplation.

Conclusion: Mei Qing redefined Chinese landscape painting by fusing formal structure with metaphysical inquiry. His works shift the function of landscape art from representation to introspective exploration, offering a vital contribution to Chinese visual philosophy. His artistic legacy lies in his capacity to transform natural forms into spiritual reflections of the self and cosmos.

Keywords: Visual Philosophy, Literati Aesthetics, Spiritual Symbolism, Chinese Landscape Painting.

Introduction

Landscape painting is a key part of art history, serving not only as a visual representation of nature but also as a method of underscoring philosophical ideas, cultural values, and spiritual ideals. This study aims to address the following research question: How does Mei Qing's landscape painting convey a unique "visual philosophy" through the integration of form, spiritual conception, and emotional depth? Meiqing's landscape art is a unique mixture of visual properties combined with meaningful artistic conception (and variable meaning) to reach an unprecedented level of visual philosophy, a term that, in this context, refers to the embedded philosophical worldview articulated through visual form in traditional Chinese painting, particularly in the literati tradition, where painting served as a medium of self-cultivation and transcendental reflection (Turner, 2009).

However, the studious discussion often emphasizes either the stylistic creation or the philosophical content of Qing-era landscape painting without fully discoursing how these extents interact in Mei Qing's practice. This paper fills that gap by examining how form and meaning combine in his portrayals of Huangshan. The formal properties in Meiqing's works are composition, line, space, and tone (Wang et al., 2022). These formal visual features are a means of delimiting the way they organize paintings and appreciate their expressive qualities. Artistic conception and cognitive sensibilities refer to the spiritual and emotional character of a work, based on traditional Chinese aesthetic conception, where nature, which evokes poetic sense and philosophical meaning (Lewis & Xu, 2020). Meiqing's landscapes achieve a balance of both contextualizing the specific realities of detail within visual, lyrical abstraction. Therefore, they express the aesthetic tradition of not strictly representing nature but as a conceptual representation, which evokes possibilities and reflections. This fusion of the concrete and the contemplating is central to what this paper refers to as Mei Qing's "visual philosophy." In this regard Baomar & Sanad, (2021), Meiqing's landscapes belong to the classical Chinese landscape painting tradition, where nature implies moral and metaphysical reflection (Zhu, 2016). The relationship between form and artistic conception in Meiqing illustrates the interaction between technique and meaning (Wang & Phungamdee, 2022). By investigating

these relations, the paper situates Mei Qing's work within broader scholarly debates on the function of Chinese landscape painting as both an artistic expression and a philosophical exploration. Meiqing's visual philosophy places an important position in the development of landscape art and provides insight into the aesthetic and cultural dialogue. Identifying how Meiqing reconciles these concepts gives a sense of the generative properties of landscape painting that carry forward its meaningfulness in history and culture (Fang, 2023). Thus, the study contributes to interdisciplinary discussions in art history, aesthetics, and Chinese philosophy, while highlighting Mei Qing's imaginative synthesis of tradition and unique expression. Research aims to analyze Mei Qing's visual philosophy by examining his landscape paintings, focusing on how his stylistic innovations and symbolic use of Huangshan reflect a fusion of artistic conception and emotional expression.

Organization of the research: Section 1 outlines the core visual philosophy behind Mei Qing's landscape painting. Section 2 provides the historical and artistic background of his work during the Ming–Qing transition. Section 3 explores the Daoist and Buddhist influences shaping his worldview. Section 4 analyzes key paintings, while Section 5 interprets their spiritual dimensions. Section 6 evaluates his artistic legacy, Section 7 offers a broader discussion, and Section 8 concludes his impact on Chinese aesthetic thought.

1. Historical and Artistic Background of Mei Qing's Landscape Art

Chinese landscape painting evolved at a deep level, especially in literati practices during the Ming and early Qing dynasties. Literati paintings (wenrenhua), created by scholar-artists, emphasized personal expression, philosophical depth, and poetic resonance rather than strict visual realism (Chang, 2010). Landscapes as painted by Chinese artists did not depict nature as did Western painting. Rather, landscapes provide meditative spaces that embody and include the artists' acts of contemplation vis-a-vis their identity, moral engagement, and spiritual connections made between humankind and the cosmos. These transitions from Ming to early Qing represented a period of significant political and cultural transformations that directly impacted

artistic production (Hsiao & Hsueh, 2020). Many artists, including Mei Qing, sought spiritual refuge and self-definition through their engagement with nature and landscape painting during this historical moment of dynastic upheaval. Mei Qing (c. 1623–1697), styled Meiqing, was a well-known painter from that period. His work is primarily important as a contextual background to his biography, and recurrence is dodged to maintain focus on artistic development. He was born in Xuancheng, in Anhui province, at a moment when the Ming dynasty had collapsed and Qing power was consolidating. These events led to many artists turning inward and searching for meaning through landscape. Trained in the literati tradition and inspired by Yuan masters Wetzel, (2002), like Huang Gongwang, Mei Qing created a unique individual style that synthesized classical lineage and originality. His connection to Shitao (another early Qing painter) reinforced his view that painting was about freedom of expression, spontaneity,

and engagement with the spirit of nature. **Figure 1** illustrates Mei Qing's practice, which utilizes expressive brushwork and layered ink techniques to create misty mountain ranges and scholar pavilions that exceed mere topographic representation. It is an image of a literati scene in the traditional style of the genre, with additional text and artistic elements, showing misty mountains and scholar's pavilions, and Huangshan as a site of introspection and transcendence. The atmospheric poetic composition and stylistic innovation show nature as a vehicle for the potential spiritual experience within art and ultimately represent the Qing dynasty's artistic exploration. The painting's spatial compression, textural density, and interplay between ink and void evoke a dynamic tension between internal emotion and external form. The figure represents Mei Qing's visual philosophy, where technique and meaning combine to suggest a cultivated spiritual experience.

Figure 1

Literati landscape painting reflecting Mei Qing's artistic philosophy

(Source: https://www.mutualart.com/Artist/Mei-Qing/F0FDC431EA8ECDD3/Artworks?utm_source=chatgpt.com)



Mei Qing's identity organization was fundamentally rooted in his engagement with Huangshan (Yellow Mountain), a historically and culturally significant place in China, with extensive connections to Daoist beliefs. Huangshan was a real and metaphysical entity for Mei Qing because of its screw-top mountains, fluctuating mists, and mythical resonance (McDowall, 2009). The many trips he took to the mountain formulated deep

visual memory that had potential and possibilities, which he navigated through strategies of selective realism, compositional overstating, and emotional symbolism. Selective exaggeration, spatial layering, and symbolic elements were employed by him to elevate the mountain from a natural form to a metaphysical symbol of transcendence. By attempting to anchor his practice in direct observation and transplant nature through layers

of brushwork and imagination, Mei Qing proposed Huangshan as more than a topographic representation but more a potential symbol of some transcendent artistry (Wang, 2010). Rather than vaguely saying that “nature was a vehicle for spiritual experience,” this section grounds that idea in visual analysis, demonstrating how Huangshan served as a compositional and abstract anchor for expressing Daoist embodiments of unity, transformation, and flow. He achieved this as his positionality moved him to a dialogue between conventional and innovative, enabling his landscape paintings to represent a critical juncture in the development of visual philosophy in early Qing China (Hao, 2018).

1. Philosophical Foundations and Artistic Vision in Mei Qing's Landscapes

Mei Qing's artistic philosophy was shaped by Daoist and Buddhist thought in connection with the literati ideals from the late Ming to early Qing periods. As a scholar-artist, Mei Qing viewed painting as the potential of inner emotional life Li, (2012), spiritual contemplation, and contemplating the relationship of human beings to nature, and not simply as a representation of reality. His landscapes serve as visual reflections on evolution, mortality, and transience—core principles within Daoist and Buddhist thinking.

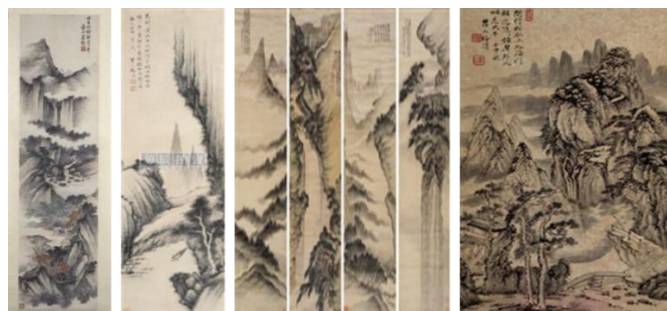
Key philosophical notions, such as qi (vital energy) and the interplay of form (xing) and emptiness (Lewis & Xu), are central to his technique. For instance, the viscous, inked mountains in his work often contrast sharply with vast, untouched areas of paper, representing the tension between material presence and metaphysical openness. His landscapes are examples of

a contemplation of age and inevitability that suggest dynamic, transitory aspects of nature. Mei Qing's works elicit central Daoist concepts: spontaneity and impermanence, and the union of opposites (Jiang, 2021). Mei Qing positioned expressing emotion as a counterbalance to formal invention. His works are depictions, but unlike representations, they can elicit moods and philosophical ideas by inventive brushwork, atmosphere, and creative composition. Rather than reiterating “spiritual contemplation” and “metaphysical representation,” the section now identifies detailed visual strategies—such as layered mists, rhythmic brushwork, and asymmetrical balance—that convey these ideas concretely. He was insistent upon the tension present between form and void, with the solid mountain mass contrasted with flowing mists, and seas of clouds that brought about a sense of movement and depth that went beyond literal geography (Lee, 2006). This is also a manifestation of the enlightened literati ideal, as real artistry conveys the spirit (qi), not the semblances of mere reality. **Figure 2** embodies Mei Qing's philosophy of art entirely, uniting realistic details and imaginative creativity. The layering of mountains, mists, and tranquil dwellings is asserted as Huangshan as a landscape and Huangshan as a felt metaphysical representation. With atmospheric effects and exaggerated compositions, Mei Qing generates layers of emotional depth, and additionally, the Daoist ideal of harmony between self and nature. His landscapes utilize the natural and turn it into an idealized, symbolic spatial reflection brought about through artistry and philosophy intersection.

Figure 2

Mei Qing's landscape blends nature, emotion, and spiritual symbolism.

(Source: <https://sma-search.api.ku.edu/ea4208842c08996bda056e641cd793b4b74066379b42086fda0a837d677233f8/1983.0107.jpg>, <https://www.artnet.com/artists/mei-qing/4>)



Mei Qing's philosophy is located between two significant predecessors: Dong Qichang and Shitao. Dong Qichang advocated for respect for past masters and a combination of traditional approaches to achieve an individual's expression. Dong Qichang and Mei Qing adopted the literati practice of synthesizing past models, specifically those from the Song and Yuan periods, in their landscape conventions. However, while Dong emphasized ideological lineage and structured brushwork, Mei Qing allowed for greater spatial freedom and a more spirited flexibility in composition (McMahon, 2019). In contrast, Shitao's work represented radical individualism, with spontaneous brushwork that purposely breaks from convention. Mei Qing had a fresh approach, and, at the same time, he carefully balanced his compositions in an outer world of direct observation and an inner world of imagination and symbol. Therefore, Mei Qing's art represents a marriage of philosophical, emotive, and technical excellence. His landscapes act as visual reflections that invite viewers into a form of spiritual conversation about nature's questions, both the external universe and the inner self. In this way, Mei Qing's landscapes do not simply depict nature; they reinterpret it as a metaphorical mirror of the self. Mountains, trees, and mists become stand-ins for emotional or spiritual states, and his work becomes a medium of visual philosophy.

2. *Alaysia of key painting*

An in-depth study of Mei Qing's major landscape painting works demonstrates his ability to merge formal execution and profound artistic conception. Central to the philosophy of the visual are his representations of

Huangshan, in particular Painting of Unfurled Sea, Lotus Peak, Alchemy Table and Quilted Pine, and Tiandu Peak (Zhang, 2022). Instead of representing these paintings poetically, this section focuses on their formal properties—line, texture, brushwork, and composition—and explores how they contribute to the expression of Mei Qing's spiritual vision. This demonstrates his divergence from realist representation and his approach to a more expressive, emotionally communicative form of landscape. Mei Qing's images of Lotus Peak and Tiandu Peak show his complete involvement with Huangshan's symbolic landscape. In Lotus Peak, the use of curvilinear lines and soft ink washes creates a compositional rhythm and atmospheric recession, encouraging a contemplative response rather than a geographic distinction. Mei Qing goes beyond a literal representation of the mountains, as he expresses their spiritual quality by utilizing free-form brushwork and layered ink shades. Figure 3 represents the graceful curves of Lotus Peak, which suggest a feeling of tranquility and poetic cultivation, while Tiandu Peak's vertical thrust exhibited ambition and transcendence. He combined actual landforms with imaginative organization of material place, and then turned nature into a meditation regarding feelings and philosophies. This vertical composition recollects upward spiritual aspiration, aligning with the Daoist theme of elevation and the Buddhist path toward enlightenment. These images also reveal his brand of equilibrium, as they demonstrate the way he represented structural form with an immeasurable spiritual feeling of solitude, autonomy, and upward ascent.

Figure 3

Mei Qing's fusion of form and philosophy, (a) Lotus Peak and (b) Tiandu Peak

(Source: https://media.mutualart.com/Images/2022_05/19/13/135250269/14df3e26-30ae-413f-a509-649f1bbeb4e_570.jpeg, https://www.art.salon/images/mei-qing-two-immortals-on-huangshan_AID90094_320x320.jpg)

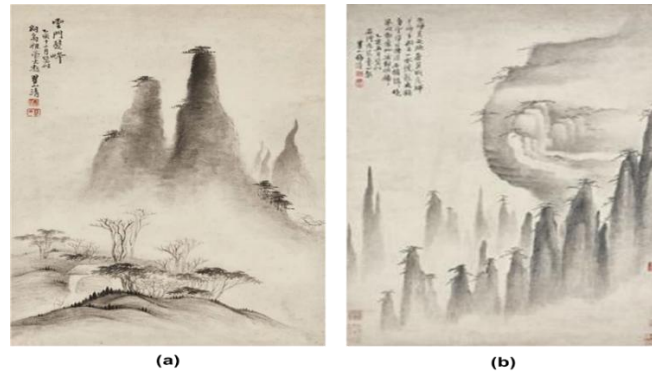


Figure 4 shows the *Painting of the Unfolded Sea*, where Mei Qing manipulates the sea of clouds that engulf Mountain Peaks, soft washes of ink and voids of space create a palpable sense of vast open space. He utilizes negative space to convey vastness, evoking reminiscences of Daoist concepts of void (Lewis & Xu) and boundlessness. The visual field lacks prominent anchoring, which shifts the viewer's perception from metaphorical depth to psychological space. This visual abstraction allows for the viewer to interpret their

impressions of emptiness and boundlessness, thereby subscribing to the Daoist traditions of voids and infinity. Contrasted with the viewer's clouded perceptions of visual space, in *Lotus Peak*, the artist uses hard edges and vertical strokes to define height, and the paintings invoke the feeling of awe and sublimity. The vantage point of the artist also fits with the compression of distance, as well as re-ordering the scale of the image. As in his other works, this image conveys matters of emotional intensity as opposed to a depiction of realistic depth.

Figure 4

Mei Qing's Unfolded Sea reveals imaginative Huangshan landscape philosophy
(Source Ref: (Zhang, 2022))



Figure 5 presents the *Alchemy Table and Futon Pine*, in which the artist provides a forum for a deeply contemplative mood, with detailed brushwork perfectly displaying the rough inflections of the rocks and twisted forms of ancient pines. Here, irregular outlines and textured brushwork accurately depict rocks and twisted pine forms, while the space creates visual tension and metaphorical openness. The pine trees, often associated with solidity and scholarly virtue, reinforce literati ideals of solitude and self-discipline. Together, the works present symbiotic themes of resilience and academic

isolation (Nelson, (2004), given the artist's deep commitment to studying small acts of nature. Tiandu Peak employs pronounced ink washes in light and dark tones, creating deep atmospheric depth and evoking a palpable sense of calmness. It makes careful use of gradations to intensify a spiritual quietness, allowing a viewer to settle into a process of stillness that encompasses all, and emphasizing Mei Qing's aim of engaging with rigorous philosophy through the art of landscape (Yang, 2023).

Figure 5

Fusion of Form Alchemy Table and Futon Pine in Mei Qing's Landscape Vision
(Source: Ref (Zhang, 2022))



Figure 6 displays Mei Qing's landscapes, which transform natural scenery into poetic expressions of emotion and philosophy. Using layered ink washes, bold brushstrokes, and thick layers of surging forms that shift perspectives, Mei Qing shows Huangshan not as an actual place but as a new condition for spiritual contemplation. His reliance on mist, isolation, and the monumental form of the mountain represents a Daoist and literati sensibility to jettison external nature observation, and in turn, retreat, assimilating the tangible into the intangible

to provoke immersive visual experiences of contemplation.

In summary, each painting is analyzed in terms of the overarching research question: how does Mei Qing's landscape art construct a visual philosophy through the interplay of form, emotion, and symbolic reference? These results are not viewed as unaccompanied compositions, but rather as philosophical interventions that utilize visual language to explore spiritual ideals.

Figure 6

Spiritual Expression through Huangshan's Form in Mei Qing's Landscapes

(Source: <https://cdn2.picryl.com/photo/2016/12/31/mei-qing-landscapes-in-various-styles-after-old-masters-19621577-cleveland-1763cd-1024.jpg>)



1. Spiritual Dimensions of Mei Qing's Landscapes and Artistic Philosophy

Throughout these works, Mei Qing employs a range of methods, including wet and dry brush effects, layering of ink tones, and asymmetry in composition, to create landscapes that are both visually engaging and philosophically meaningful. These visual approaches are not merely formal devices; they serve metaphorical purposes. For instance, the use of space around mountain peaks often elicits Daoist notions of void (wu)

and non-attachment, while the layered washes emulate fog or cloud, aligning with Buddhist metaphors of transience and illusion. His appropriations of space and perspective free the viewer from physical constraints while promoting a reflective and immersive engagement. Importantly, these landscapes signify a notable development in Chinese landscape art where, for Mei Qing, the emphasis shifted from documenting nature to delivering its transformative inner spirit. Thus, Mei Qing's key works are more than just pictures; they

provide a strong vehicle for understanding his view of unity between external form and inner meaning, an important characteristic of his practice (Widmer, 2015). This integration is primarily evident in works illustrating Huangshan, where sharply depicted ridges give way to transcendental ink washes, recollecting both physical remoteness and emotional detachment. Mei Qing's landscapes go beyond visual representation and work to articulate highly symbolic and philosophical ideas. His imagery of Huangshan lifts the geographical terrain beyond its actual existence to serve as an image of solitude, freedom, and spiritual transcendence (Schmidt, 2008). Rather than reiterating compositions of distinction, this section illustrates how specific visual conceits reflect Daoist ideas of ziran (naturalness) and Buddhist meditative withdrawal. These understandings are grounded in both philosophical texts and visual elements, avoiding generalizations. As Mei Qing combines unprecedented visual expression and literati ideas, nature becomes a landscape of philosophy and experience. Huangshan, for Mei Qing, is not just an acclaimed scenic site but a symbolic place for self-exploration and fulfillment. The lofty mountains, hidden or fragmented by layered point of view, signify not only the expansiveness of nature but also the inward landscape of the mind. Isolation is a thematic content found throughout his landscapes, as he depicts distant huts, meandering paths, and isolated people to signify the individual's turn away from worldly pursuits. This might reflect the literati spiritual distance to the world, influenced as it was by both Daoism, which taught apathetic detaching from deeds and ideas about non-being, and Buddhism, which emphasizes impermanence, and the taste was always combined (Dong, 2010). Nature

functions as his aesthetic structure and emotional refuge. This creative reconfiguration sustains his purpose of visual philosophy—an articulation of the self's fluid relationship with the cosmos. The clouds, the brushstrokes, and the space (not spatial order), then, would seem to simulate the rhythms of visual thinking so akin to meditation or a meditative inwardness (Keulemans, 2007). His landscapes are not intended to accurately represent physical sight, but are rather emotional states and constellations of metaphysical thoughts. Nature becomes a mirror for inner life; mountains and valleys signify mental states with visual depth, capturing consciousness layers. Mei Qing's disengagement from Huangshan as a montage of viewpoints and imagined juxtapositions is a way of creating freely (Jang, 2015). His mountain capes embody flexibility of mind and opportunity to build from memory, imagining, and feeling, rather than needing to conform to a positional truth. This shifts his paintings into a philosophical investigation, an expression of identity, and an act of intellectual freedom. Mei Qing synthesizes landscape, symbolism, and philosophy to provide viewers with not just a contained image, but an experience of interpenetration of self and universe. Instead of generalizing about "aesthetic structure," the section now highlights how each illustrated element—brushstroke, void, layering—functions as an analogy for values such as non-attachment, seclusion, and transience. **Table 1** summarizes how Mei Qing's landscapes visually convey a philosophical message of solitude, freedom, and transcendence; and each artistic component functions as a symbolic metaphor and represents aspects of his inner life, his spiritual values, and creative independence.

Table 1

Symbolic and Philosophical Dimensions in Mei Qing's Landscape Art

Theme	Visual Expression	Philosophical Meaning
Huangshan as Symbol	Towering peaks, layered perspectives, imagined compositions	Represents more than geography—becomes a metaphor for the artist's inner world and ideals
Solitude	Isolated huts, lone paths, distant figures	Embodies literati detachment, Daoist withdrawal from worldly affairs
Freedom	Imaginative geography, montage of views	Reflects creative liberation and intellectual autonomy
Nature as Refuge	Rhythmic brushstrokes, clouds, and enveloping atmosphere	Suggests nature as a sanctuary for emotional and spiritual renewal
Inner Life	Shifting perspectives, symbolic forms	Nature mirrors internal consciousness and personal identity
Transcendence	Mist, asymmetrical space, spiritual tone	Evokes Daoist and Buddhist ideals, to escape from impermanence and worldly illusion

2. Mei Qing's Contribution to Chinese Art

Mei Qing is undoubtedly a transformative figure in the history of Chinese landscape painting. His innovative

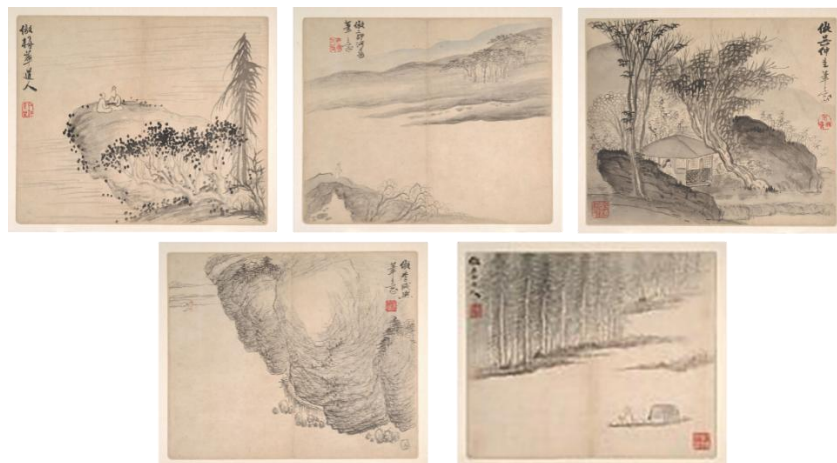
combination of literary ideas with new expressive formal experimentation represents a departure from past artistic practices and made an indelible contribution to how Chinese visual philosophy developed in the future (Li, 2015). Emerging in the transition from the Ming to Qing dynasty (loss of imperial patronage), Mei Qing spawned a personal style that transformed how people could see, think about, and paint nature. Whereas earlier masters like Dong Qichang aimed to balance brushwork and scholarly reticence based on classical models, Mei Qing provided more liberating approaches to visualizing the natural world as an artist. Mei Qing is truly a revolutionary **Figure 7** within the continuing story of Chinese landscape painting. He had an innovative, unique way of fusing literary expectations within his own new, expressive formal experimentation that was innovative to artistic practices seen in the past, while making a lasting contribution to how the Chinese visual philosophy could be developed in the future. Mei Qing

arose during an important transition period from Ming to the first Qing emperor's reign (loss of individual imperial patronage); he generated a personal style and transformed how Chinese painting from nature could be seen, conceived, and painted (Barnhart, 2004). While previous masters, like Dong Qichang, desired to balance brushwork with scholarly reticence conditioned by classical models, Mei Qing offered more liberating ways to visualize the natural world as an artist. His impact can especially be seen in the painter Shitao, who pushed the envelope on the possibilities of representation with brush and ink (Chaves, 2005). Mei Qing firmly established the movement away from representation and imitation to one of expression and concept. He elevated landscape painting to a realm where a vision of art and inner truth could exist by working from form to meaning. Mei Qing mapped out a path away from a linear trajectory of Chinese art towards the emergence of modernity.

Figure 7

Symbolic Composition Reflecting Mei Qing's Daoist Aesthetic Vision

(Source: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/61825>)



Discussion and Conclusion

Mei Qing had an approach to Chinese landscape painting that was innovative in that he fused formal structure with philosophical significance (Liu, 2017). Rather than articulating him as a “revolutionary figure,” it is additionally precise to view Mei Qing as a transitional artist who developed the expressive potential of the literati tradition while remaining

grounded in its aesthetic foundations. True to the literati ethos, Mei Qing rose above realism and represented landscapes as a form of emotional expression and spiritual significance (Hua & Meiqing, 2021). In his view of Huangshan's notable peaks, including the Lotus Peak, Tiandu Peak, Alchemy Table, and Unfolded Sea, he intentionally moved toward a “spectacular landscape” style, full of imagination and atmospheric complexity. Mei Qing's compositional strategies, wherein he reductively condenses the demonstrable geography and

creatively combines and composites geography and multiple iconic scenes, represent an elegant graduated mastery between coherent topography and creative license. This duality transitions Huangshan from a concrete place to a symbol of a transcendental goal and creative space. Mei Qing's brushwork and use of ink modulations further valorize this conversion by encoding both the tangible aspect of nature's surfaces and the intangible qualities of nature. For example, his thread of brushstrokes in *Alchemy Table* and *Futon Pine* are embedded with references of persistence and scholarship's withdrawal into solitude; meanwhile, the consequences of the ink washes in *Tiandu Peak* evoke aura and contemplation in stasis. The visual techniques, however, are not creations in solitariness—they are engaged in dialogue with, and at times diverged from, patterns established by precursors such as Dong Qichang.

While Dong highlighted systematic brushwork and binary style categories (Northern vs. Southern schools), Mei Qing's landscapes are more gestural and fluid, presenting an aesthetic openness that indicates later investigations by contemporaries like Shitao. Ultimately, there is a philosophical dimension to Mei Qing's works. He works outside of an academic sphere while integrating ideas found in Daoist and Buddhist traditions with literati pursuits, with attention to both themes of solitude and transitory refuge in nature, and transcendence. His inclusion of haze, clouds, and shattered spatial construction creates a sense of mystery that provokes introspection. Critical scholarship may examine the extent of Mei Qing's originality, particularly in relation to his reliance on earlier literati ideals. However, his focus on vibrant depth and conceptual ambiguity reorients the understanding of landscape art, not simply as poetic representation, but as a space for metaphysical inquiry. In contrast with earlier masters like Dong Qichang, Mei Qing's landscapes are more gestural and spontaneous, indicating a fluid style that anticipates the later developments of Qing painters such as Shitao. This study contributes to a cultured understanding of Chinese visual philosophy by indicating how Mei Qing complicates the binaries between realism and imagination, technique and thought. In short, Mei Qing's combination of form with conceptual intent reveals a turning point in Chinese visual philosophy. Future scholarship could benefit from

relative studies that position Mei Qing's work within cross-regional or transhistorical frameworks, examining parallels between his landscapes and those of other spiritualist painters, or exploring his legacy in modern Chinese ink practices. He moves between simply showing a representation and making landscape art that is more emotionally charged and cognitively engaged. This exhibition and essay allow for a greater understanding of Mei Qing's impact on the visual development of Qing dynasty landscape aesthetics and are a reminder of his continuing legacy within the tradition of literati painting.

Mei Qing's landscape paintings demonstrate a remarkable transition in Chinese art, combining formal innovation with deep philosophical meaning. With his unique imagined compositions and masterful brushwork, he made a transition from a naturalistic depiction of Huangshan to an expressive style of "spectacular landscapes", with spiritual aspiration and emotional depth being the focus. By synthesizing Daoist, Buddhist, and literati traditions, he infused his works with themes of solitude, creative autonomy, and transcendence. Mei Qing redefined landscape art as a form of personal and metaphysical investigation. By explicitly balancing spatial coherence alongside the freedom of composition in landscape artwork, his impact not only expanded aesthetics in Qing dynasty literati painting but also enriched the larger tradition of Chinese visual philosophy, and undoubtedly established him as a key figure in the development of landscape aesthetics. It has been shown by this study that Mei Qing's approach to landscape painting is represented not merely by technical mastery but by a deliberate negotiation between inherited tradition and individual vision.

Each analytical section emphasizes a different proportion of his visual philosophy—from his engagement with classical models to his compositional methods, spiritual symbolism, and integration of personal experience. It is demonstrated by these findings how form and meaning were mutually strengthened in his practice, contributing to broader questions about expression, identity, and metaphysical considerations in Qing-era visual culture.

Looking forward, Mei Qing's work invites further relative studies with contemporaries like Shitao, as well as visionary analysis using frameworks from aesthetics and religious studies. His paintings offer rich material for

rethinking the confluence of artistic technique and spiritual expression in Chinese art history.

Acknowledgments

The authors express their gratitude and appreciation to all participants.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Ethical considerations in this study were that participation was entirely optional.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contribute to this study.

References

- Baomar, Z., & Sanad, R. (2021). A study of landscape painting development—Past, present and future perspectives. *New Trends and Issue Proceedings on Humanities and Social Sciences*, 8(1), 01-11. <https://doi.org/10.18844/prosoc.v7i4.5774>
- Barnhart, R. M. (2004). *Cultivated Landscapes: Chinese Paintings from the Collection of Marie-Hélène and Guy Weill*. By K. Hearn Maxwell. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art; New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2002. xv, 204 pp. \$40.00 (cloth). *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 63(2), 496-498. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911804001214>
- Chang, M. G. (2010). Pictures for Use and Pleasure: Vernacular Painting in High Qing China. *China Review International*, 17(3), 299-303. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cri.2010.0072>
- Chaves, J. (2005). Painters as Envoys: Korean Inspiration in Eighteenth-Century Japanese Nanga. By Burglind Jungmann. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004. 272 pp. \$60.00 (cloth). *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 64(1), 214-216. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911805000471>
- Dong, X. (2010). Meeting of the Eyes: Invented Gesture, Cinematic Choreography, and Mei Lanfang's Kun Opera Film. *The Opera Quarterly*, 26(2-3), 200-219. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oq/kbq018>
- Fang, H. (2023). *The Ming's Cosmopolitan Beginnings: Painting and Pictorial Art in Yingtian, 1368-1421* New York University]. <https://www.proquest.com/openview/9ab9a4c3697e13b6a7e885363209d3af/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>
- Hao, B. (2018). Study on the Construction Techniques of Virtual Environment in Traditional Chinese Landscape Painting. 4th International Conference on Arts, Design and Contemporary Education (ICADCE 2018), <https://doi.org/10.2991/icadce-18.2018.44>
- Hsiao, M.-J., & Hsueh, S.-H. (2020). The Craft Aesthetics of the Cultural Relics Collection in the Qing Dynasty. International Conference on Human-Computer Interaction, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-49788-0_22
- Hua, Y., & Meiqing, W. (2021). Xu-style Garden Architecture of the Han Dynasty: Hanging Waterside Pavilion. *Journal of Landscape Research*, 13(1). <https://doi.org/10.16785/j.issn1943-989x.2021.1.005>
- Jang, S. (2015). The culture of art collecting in imperial China. *A Companion to Chinese Art*, 47-72. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118885215.ch2>
- Jiang, C. (2021). Breakthrough and Experiment: The Schema Shapes and Structures of Painting Prefaces and Postscripts in Prosperous Qing Dynasty. *International Journal of Social Science and Education Research*, 4(10), 255-261. [https://doi.org/10.6918/IJOSSER.202110_4\(10\).0042](https://doi.org/10.6918/IJOSSER.202110_4(10).0042)
- Keulemans, P. (2007). Listening to the printed martial arts scene: Onomatopoeia and the qing dynasty storyteller's voice. *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 51-87. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25066838>
- Lee, S.-C. (2006). Forgeries Signed as Mei Qing: Mount Huang Paintings. *Artibus Asiae*, 66(1), 41-88. <https://doi.org/10.61342/JLJM5413>
- Lewis, T. E., & Xu, L. (2020). Chinese landscape painting and the study of being: An imagined encounter between Martin Heidegger and Xia Gui. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 39(3), 309-320. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-020-09708-x>
- Li, J. (2015). On the Famous Painting "Search Every Lofty Peaks for Draft" in the Record of Shi tao Drawing Theory. 2015 3rd International Conference on Education, Management, Arts, Economics and Social Science, <https://doi.org/10.2991/icemaess-15.2016.26>
- Li, W.-y. (2012). Gardens and illusions from late Ming to early Qing. *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 72(2), 295-336. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jas.2012.0018>
- Liu, L. (2017). Path, place, and pace in mid-Ming Suzhou landscape painting. *Res: Anthropology and aesthetics*, 67(1), 207-224. <https://doi.org/10.1086/693993>
- McDowall, S. (2009). *Qian Qianyi's reflections on Yellow Mountain: traces of a late-Ming hatchet and chisel*. Hong Kong University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9789882206359>
- McMahon, K. (2019). The art of the bedchamber and Jin Ping Mei. *Nan Nü*, 21(1), 1-37. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685268-00211P01>
- Nelson, S. E. (2004). *Cultivated Landscapes: Chinese Paintings from the Collection of Marie-Helene and Guy Weill*. *China Review International*, 11(2), 363-365. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cri.2005.0092>

- Schmidt, J. D. (2008). Yuan Mei (1716–98) on Women. *Late Imperial China*, 29(2), 129-185. <https://doi.org/10.1353/late.0.0013>
- Turner, M. (2009). Classical Chinese landscape painting and the aesthetic appreciation of nature. *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 43(1), 106-121. <https://doi.org/10.2307/40263708> <https://doi.org/10.1353/jae.0.0033>
- Wang, G., Shen, J., Yue, M., Ma, Y., & Wu, S. (2022). A computational study of empty space ratios in Chinese landscape painting, 618–2011. *Leonardo*, 55(1), 43-47. https://doi.org/10.1162/leon_a_02105
- Wang, S. (2010). *Wang Yuanqi and the orthodoxy of self-reflection in Early Qing Landscape painting* University of Pennsylvania]. <https://www.proquest.com/openview/be94109dc6f4fbdc1eefceeffbcb3916/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750>
- Wang, S., & Phungamdee, S. (2022). Aesthetic embodiment of stones in literati paintings with garden themes in Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary in Management and Tourism*, 6(2), 113-128. <https://doi.org/10.14456/ijmmt.2022.10>
- Wetzel, J. (2002). Hidden connections: Courtesans in the art world of the Ming Dynasty. *Women's Studies*, 31(5), 645-669. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00497870214051>
- Widmer, E. (2015). Letters as Windows on Ming-Qing Women's Literary Culture. *A History of Chinese Letters and Epistolary Culture*, 744-774. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004292123_022
- Yang, Q. (2023). Contemporary Chinese landscape paintings: genealogies of form. *Journal of Visual Art Practice*, 22(4), 347-371. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14702029.2023.2264076>
- Zhang, G. (2022). The Painting Creation of Huangshan Mountain by Mei Qing. 8th International Conference on Arts, Design and Contemporary Education (ICADCE 2022), <https://doi.org/10.55060/s.atssh.221107.022>
- Zhu, W. (2016). Scenic Depictions of Huizhou in Ming-Qing Literature. *Journal of chinese humanities*, 2(1), 55-76. <https://doi.org/10.1163/23521341-12340026>