

View of nature found in East Asian art: On the basis of Art Educational Implications

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Based on human's emotion and intellect, art depicts or sometimes even transcends life, representing each culture in which it had been formed. By looking at the art forms which represents the characteristics of Asian and Western culture respectively, this presentation questions about the 'environmental' matter that modern people are facing. We are going to view East Asian art in three aspects - 'Life(生命)', 'Change(變化)' and 'Practice(實踐)' – and compare it with Western art.

1. Aspect of Life(生命)

1) Nature as 'Liveliness'

In East Asian philosophy, all the things in the phenomenal world derived from Tao(道), the origin of the universe, developing into things or human beings. The origin of all the things in the universe including human beings is one, and all of these things correspond to each other. In East Asia, the key to this correspondence is 'Ch'i(氣, vital energy or natural force)', which is itself a biological phenomena revealed in the field of exchanging experience between our body and the world. Like the way of following Ch'i's creation of life, 'Tao' models itself after nature. The 'nature' here should be recognized in the context of 'the way it is.' The nature in East Asia is not categorized from a detached, objective viewpoint under dichotomous thinking of seeing things as epistemic subject/epistemic object, but is an ultimate world in which human beings can harmonize and unify within by the principal of 'the way it is.' Under this understanding of nature came out the unique genre, 'Sansuhwa(山水畫, Landscape Painting)'. Guo-Xi(郭熙, 1020-1090), an outstanding painter of Northern Song Dynasty, wrote a book about painting theory: 『LimCheonGoChi(林泉高致)』, which had a profound influence on later Sansuhwa painting. This book shows us many metamorphic phrases that compares Sansu(mountain) to a living creature, especially the human body. If we look at <JoChoonDo(早春圖)> (fig. 1) by Guo-Xi in 1072, we can feel the true essence of 'living mountain.' This drawing depicts nature's changing scenery of early spring's reviving earth. The cloud-shaped mountains with a sense of strong volume are just like a living dragon awoke from the spring mists, soaring

above and wriggling. The close-range, mid-range and distant view forms an animated rhythm which harmonize with the eccentric boughs and mists, staffage, effects of light, creating the liveliness of the ever-changing living nature. As Guo-Xi had mentioned, drawing the changing mountain at each hour, time, season is eventually achieving true communication with the person who appreciates Sansuhwa(Landscape painting).

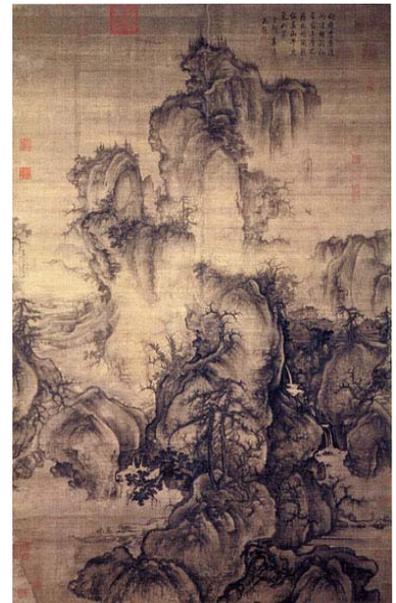


fig.1) Guo-Xi, JoChoonDo

This kind of view on nature in Western art was dealt as a crucial element in Impressionism, which was the first-ever overall and innovative trend of art after the Renaissance. In Impressionism scenery was mainly covered as a subject, in an attempt to capture the momentary and transient visual

impressions. The following is <Rouen Cathedral>series (fig. 2) by Claude Monet(1840-1936), the master painter of impressionist painting, painted in 1894. In these paintings, Monet focused on how the visual sensations on the same subject matter changes under different seasons, time and changing position of the sun. Just like a light dispersed by a prism into its spectral components, each colors are ‘dotted’, applied side-by-side with as little mixing as possible in Impressionist paintings, which then makes optical mixing effects of colors. The sudden rise of Impressionism in Western art is related to the rapid progress of modern science (especially optical science and chemistry). The unmixed paints on the canvas show the materiality of itself. Within these paintings based on the human senses, we can see that there underlies what Western art have been pursuing and will be pursuing. Now we can notice the similarities and differences between

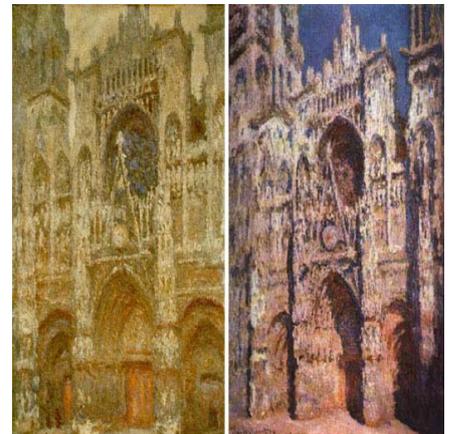


fig.2) Monet, Rouen Cathedral, Grey

Times/Rouen Cathedral, Full Sunlight
Both paintings observed the constantly changing nature and tried to depict it with great delicacy. However, Monet’s approach to the color value of light that lies beneath the appearances of objects as an intrinsic value was more of an analytical method by using color dots, whereas Guo-Xi’s approach was focused on nature’s animated liveliness.

2) Expressing ‘Liveliness’

(1) Concept of ‘Ch’iWoonSaengDong(氣韻生動)’

In East Asia, nature and human beings are recognized as forms connected by Ch'i(氣). In East Asian art, Ch'i is the most important concept in creator's performance or in appreciative criticism about the creation, so the way how Ch'i is manifested is the main concern in creation and criticism. Xie He(謝赫) of Southern Qi(南齊) Dynasties wrote 'Six principles of Chinese painting(繪畫六法)', which had a great influence on later Asian art history. Among the Six Principles Sa Hyeok mentioned, the first and the most important concept was 'Ch'iWoonSaengDong'. There are various interpretations among scholars about the meaning of 'Ch'iWoonSaengDong', but generally it is interpreted as 'living spirit's vitality' or 'rhythmical harmony of life.'

(2) Expression of line(brush stroke, 線)

In East Asian art, expression of 'Ch'iWoonSaengDong' is inseparable from expression of brush stroke. 'Drawing' a stroke implies directivity, time and movement. At the point when humankind's civilization bloomed, Western art headed toward expression of 'surface(面)', whereas East Asian art placed emphasis on the expression of 'line(線).' Expression of surface is a way of understanding the contrast by the play of light, resulting in a three-dimensional reproduction. For instance, in **<Bosc coreale mural painting> (Fig. 3)**, an example of Greek and Roman art which is the origin of Western civilization, a high sense of realism is achieved owing to the contrast of light and shade, three-dimensional depiction of plentiful surface. The walls of indoors are portrayed like windows opened toward the outer world.



fig.3) Rome, Bosc coreale mural painting

The pursuit of this kind of realism in Greek and Roman art, which is the source of Western art, is inextricably connected to their lives. There are numerous anecdotes in the Greek myths about adventurous people who dare to travel the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea, broadening the trade market and fighting battles. Thereupon, philosophy began with these enterprising maritime people. Thales's cosmological thesis held that the world started from material-water- and not from God. Democritus held that the root of universe was atoms, while Pythagoras thought that it was numbers. This means reasoning and substantiating the world¹. Numbers generate symmetry, equilibrium and rhythm. As Protagoras' saying 'man the measure' implies, the numerous sculptures and murals of glorious civilization, or the world of brave heroes and gods with dauntless spirit shows the interest in the history and civilization made by 'human'and human. But the Greeks' ultimate concern was in ideal human character –a hero- and not in real, flawed human beings. The

Greeks were obsessed with mimesis, but they weren't just a submissive imitator but also were an independent antagonist, familiar to the concept of artist who freely makes up for the imperfection in nature with one's creative abilities. When art is a simple imitation of nature, it isn't as good as nature itself or is just a mere deception. But when art makes up for the deficiencies in nature's each component, it is thought that art can actually be better than nature because it competes with nature as a newly created image of beauty². Even though art is based on observing the nature, it has the possibility to improve nature by surpassing the actual nature objects. These human abilities are thought to have derived from human mind, especially rational reasoning and imagination. Plato thought 'Ideas', the original form, were ever-existing in human reason and intellect. Since 'reason' was of great importance in human being to the Greeks, their art was an art of intelligence by people who thought clearly and lucidly. Art can be clearly calculated and formalized, aesthetical proportion which can be distinctly quantified is important, and each part's proportion should form a perfectly harmonious whole. The painters of the late Renaissance period succeeded this kind of Greece's aesthetic belief. The outcomes of rational style in Greek and Roman art-mathematical proportion or balance of form, object(especially human body) based on reasoning, depicting surface by using contrast, realistic reproduction of reality owing to the arrangement of perspective, etc-are based on the way they think about human independence and culture in their lives.

While Western art emphasized expression of 'surface,' East Asian art adhered to the expression of 'line'. In East Asian art, the lines used for portraits are called 'Miao(描).' There are as many as 18 sorts of 'Miao' mentioned in the painting theory of the Ming dynasty, which most of them

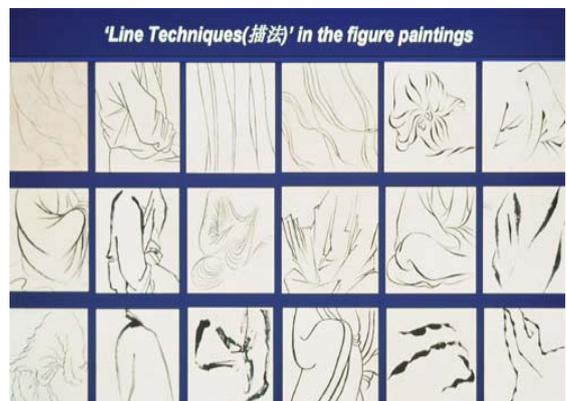


fig.4) 18sorts of line techniques in figure paintings

are named after natural objects, and as it moves on to later periods the lines take more unrestrained form (fig. 4). According to the thickness, speed, change of pressure and direction, the lines of East Asian art is expressed in a variety of strokes. Numerous of unique 'Miao' styles were created throughout history by reflecting the texture of cloth, shape of wrinkles in the clothes, the characteristic of observed object, or even further, the thoughts and nature of painter him/herself.

In East Asian art, 'drawing' a line doesn't mean the drawing of a mere outline. The line in East Asian art is commonly referred to as 'stroke(劃)', which implies the act of 'drawing'. The act of 'drawing' a line is an expression of 'vigor(勢)' that contains direction, and is a

vibrant expression of a living being's movement. Every thing in nature is understood in context of Ch'i. The efforts of East Asians to express the interchange and vibrancy of Ch'i are concentrated in the expression of line. 'Reproduction' wasn't the main interest in East Asian art. Of course, in the point of starting from a visual image and expressing it, many paintings of East Asian representation-form imitation(形似)- for record or decorative purpose were made, but these representational paintings were different from representational point of view in Western art - the representational aspects of reality which human reason seeks, and the eagerness for the world of origin that exists in human reason -. After the Impressionists emerged, Western art develops into abstract art in the 20th century, the shape of object disappeared, which is also associated to metaphysical ideal world that Western civilization have been pursuing. Contrary to this, since East Asian art pursued a different perspective from 'representation', the object's unique element of form was never abandoned in spite of an extreme representation or a reduced expression with only a few lines. The Greeks acknowledged and started from reality but admired the utopia which was beyond reality. The East Asians and the Greeks both are alike in the sense of acknowledging reality, but the East Asians tried to find an ideal world within reality and though that they could enter that kind of world through nature. Therefore, the unique element of object's form which nature made is maintained. The important thing is to feel and express the liveliness of myself and the object in nature- the way it is(自然) or the nature as a substance-. East Asia has its roots in Yellow River civilization. The Yellow River civilization sprang from a rich soil for agriculture. Human beings lived according to the four seasons and the natural cycle of nature. Only when humans become one with the nature do they understand the rhythm of nature and thus the lives of human beings will be enriched. So the nature isn't a stationary thing that has to be conquered, pioneered and renovated but is an endlessly circulating and changing flow which humans had to become one with it. In other words, this representation of the Ch'i's movement can be said to be an expression of the line(線). Expression of line is not associated with analytic thinking, but rather an integrated and intuitive way of thinking. For East Asia reasoning, the line that implies abstraction which is simplifying things, symbolism, fluidity, potential of changing is an appropriate method of representation.

2. Aspect of Change(變化)

1) YinYangWuXing (陰陽五行) and art

'Yin Yang(陰陽)' means a pair of polar or seemingly contrary concepts. The natural order in East Asia is seen as moving, which isn't disordered but rather a circulation between Yin

and Yang. The Yin and Yang takes part in the operation of the universe by turning into five fundamental materials which are called 'Wu Xing(五行)'. They are: water(水), fire(火), wood(木), metal(金), earth(土). The Wu Xing may simply seem to represent five materials, but actually it also symbolizes various aspects of the world such as color, taste, sound, seasons, direction, morals and so on which is connected with properties of these substances. When Wu Xing is combined to Yin Yang theory, all things aren't separate but rather, the entire universe becomes a single field. All the things have patterns of Yin and Yang, and will be restructured into an order that all things affect each other not by determinism and the mechanistic law of causality, but by some sort of a holistic response. It isn't stationary but is rather an endless movement, not discontinuous but a continuous world and also is a world of ecological organisms.



The Yin Yang theory can be seen in the name of 'Sansuhwa', fig. 5) Jung Sun,KeumKangJunDo in the form of contrast between two fundamental element, mountain and water. As an example, in <KeumKangJeonDo(金剛全圖)> (fig. 5) by Korea's painter **Jung Sun** of the 18th century, white rock mountaintop which is a symbol of an ideal world and earthy mountain in which the life of living things are lead, vertical and horizontal, strength and softness, brightness and darkness, large and small are harmonized through the contrast they generate. The whole screen is circular, the composition and movement of rocky mountain and earthy mountain is similar to the 'Tae geuk' symbol.

2) Development of Sumukhwa(水墨畫, East Asian ink painting)

As said earlier, the Yin Yang principal that lies beneath the changeable phenomenon of universe can also be clearly seen in Sumukhwa. Sumukhwa is a eco-friendly painting, using only black ink and water on paper. Sumukhwa is a painting which black ink of Yin and brush of Yang meet together and form a variety of lines and ink density on paper. The variety of lines is mentioned before, but the black ink also has a wide variety, over 70 tonalities, from dense to delute. Sumukhwa can be roughly classified in Western drawings as drawing(dessin), which consists of only achromatic colors.

However Sumukhwa in the East Asia is regarded as the form of highest art which can even surpass the colorings. The 'Pai Miao(白描)', which is a drawing using only Sumuk line, is regarded as one of the best among the Sumukhwa. In East Asia, Sumuk is not just a simple achromatic color. It clearly has two color positions among the aforementioned five

colors: blue, white, red, black, yellow. Xuan(玄, black) is the 'Xuan' from Xuanxue(玄學, Neo-Taoism), so it can be seen that behind the develop of Sumukhwa there was a close relationship with Xuanxue(Taoism or Neo-Taoism) which led to the development of Sansuhwa. 'Xuan' is a concept in Taoism meaning the origin of the universe beyond cognizance, and this is referred to as 'Tao'. The reason why the concept of Xuan can be expressed by color is because of the distant landscape as vista begins. In other words, when landscape is seen from a distant place, all the colors of the landscape are mixed, becoming the color of Xuan. Black or gray color is the color that appears when you mixed all the colors, and it is the color that appears when materials containing all kinds of colors have been burned, so it is regarded as the fundamental color. It is the color that appears when chromatic colors reached full maturity through purification. So actually in East Asian art history, glory days of the colored painting moved on to the heyday of Sumukhwa. So the plain black, which is without doing(artificiality, intentional actions), is the natural(自然, the way it is) color.

3) Being(有), Emptiness(無) and Vacant Space(餘白)

The black space in East Asian art is called 'vacant space(餘白)'. It is not too much to say that the history of Sumukhwa development, which a variety of brush and ink method(筆墨法) was invented, is also the history of vacant space development. Vacant space isn't simply a space of lacking. Emptiness(無) shows the traits of Tao. Emptiness doesn't mean 'nothingness', it means 'emptiness(虛)'. The emptiness makes use(用) possible. The emptiness is the latent form before



fig. 6) Rome, Villa of Livia's Garden



fig. 7) Cui Bai, SsangHuiDo

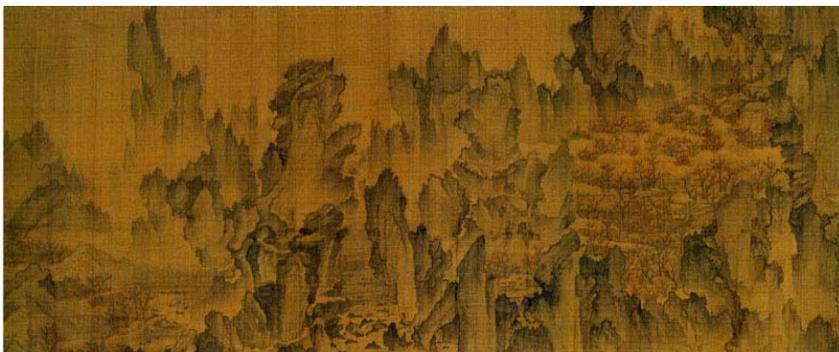
the realization and is the potentiality of all existence³. Unlike East Asia's 'Emptiness', 'Being(有)' is of importance in the West. Parmenides saw the being as the essence of the universe. He defines "For being is, but nothing is not." Aristotle saw being as 'substance', Democritus saw it as 'atoms.' These kinds of thoughts characterized Western cosmology by the world of 'substance.' It can be said that when Western people seek the essence of the universe, the important thing is not absence but being, not emptiness but substance. The picture on the left is in Roman fresco décor of <Villa of Livia's Garden> (fig. 6). The beautiful garden is filled with all sorts of trees, plants, flowers, cages with birds, a compact of many different colors. Also, there are two double fences installed between the garden and the civilized world in which human beings dwell. The picture on the right is

<SsangHuiDo(雙喜圖)> (fig. 7), painted by **Cui Bai(崔白)** in Northern Song dynasty, 1061. Two chirping birds flying towards the hare and rustling autumn leaves, hare looking at them with startled eyes. This scene emits a strange tension and auditory stimuli. The background in which these natural elements are drawn is empty with space and there are no barrier between those and the observer.

Emptiness in East Asia Emptiness means Ch'i which is full of generating, changing and creating. When Ch'i is concentrated it forms a substance, and when a substance's Ch'i is dispersed the substance is dissipated and goes back to the form of Ch'i in the universe. The characteristics of Western and Asian culture are that one is the universe as a substance and the other one is the universe as a Ch'i. One is the opposition between substance and emptiness, while the other one is a win-win co-existence of substance and emptiness.⁴

4) Changing viewpoint

<MongYuDoWonDo(夢遊桃源圖)> (fig. 8) is a painting by the Korean painter Ahn Gyeon in Choseon period, based on the story of a dream by Prince Anpyeong in April 20th, 1447(Sejong Era 29). In point of the fantastic cloud-like 'Ch'uan t'ün ts'un(the way of drawing rocks by transforming the circular shapes similar to that of a cloud)', the lighting effect under the rocks,



The 'SuJiBup(the way of drawing from the root of the tree trunk, branches, leaves)' of 'HaeJoMiao(depicting branches like a sharp crab leg)', this painting is based on the Guo-

fig. 8) Ahn Gyeon, MongYuDoWonDo

Xi-esque drawing style of Northern Song dynasty. But Ahn Gyeon's unique aspects can be seen in the scene development method based on a story, composition, placement of landscapes and objects, etc. The story begins diagonally from the real world under the left side of the screen to the world of utopia on the upper right hand side. Along with the Taoism-ish dream story the screen arouses a sense of magnificence and profoundness, owing to the use of various viewpoints in the expression method. The reality on the left is drawn with 'Level distance(平遠)', the rugged mountains with 'High distance(高遠)', and the wide spread utopia with 'Bird's-eye view(鳥瞰圖)' which 'Deep distance(深遠)' is applied. The perspective which these three kinds of viewpoints is called 'San Yüan(三遠法)'. It can all be applied in one single screen as in <MongYuDoWonDo>, or only one or two perspectives

can be used in priority. As we have experienced the expression in three kinds of perspectives in this picture, the painter's eyes follow, observe and compose the landscapes, as well as the viewer's eyes follow the landscapes in the screen. Since the viewpoint is not a fixed point, it can freely move about along the landscapes' scenery. For East Asians, nature isn't something to look on with folded arms. It is something in which we lead our lives and excuse. It is the realization of ultimate Tao, something that humans want to be unified into and become one with.

Outlook on nature in Western can also be seen in the viewpoint. **<School of Athens> (fig. 9)** by Raphael in 1510-1511 is filled with astonishingly precise and rich depiction of the Greek philosophers. The figures are depicted realistically in an overall stability owing to the focus on symmetry, so it looks as if the figures are walking slowly onto a grand stage. The majestically designed architectural space



fig. 9) Raphael, School of Athens

for the background gives a spatial depth of the screen. Despite having a number of unique characters, the screen isn't distracted but is balanced and unified harmoniously. It is done by applying the perspective of placing all the elements in a unified field.

Located slightly below the middle of the screen between Plato and Aristotle, vanishing point, which is the center point of the perspective, is set and in this sense Raphael represented the figures and the buildings according to precisely and mathematically calculated laws. This method, representing the three-dimensional sense of distance and space on a two-dimensional plane, is called 'Perspective', which is the most significant discovery in Western art history. There is a vanishing point in perspective which is a focal point of the view that human set. It is a visual method which only can be derived from scientific way of thinking and precise mathematical calculations. As it can be seen in (fig. 3), there also was some application of perspective in Hellenistic art. These characteristics are moved on to the Renaissance era, but the exact calculations based on mathematical laws, the application of geometric configurations, etc., were the product of the Renaissance period. The 'Linear Perspective', which gives the optical illusion of objects receding caused by lines stretching toward the vanishing point, it becomes the foundation of Western painting 500 years after the Renaissance.

3. Aspect of Practice(實踐)

In this chapter, East Asian art ' literati painting ' genre will be examined as a practice in everyday living and as a general liberal arts education. East Asia philosophy does not pursue an extreme metaphysical world which is a production of human reason's endless progress. Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism all puts the consequence on the practical areas of human life. In East Asia, especially among literary men since the days of Northern Song dynasty, the tendency of clearing one's temperament through 'Literati painting (文人畫)' was formed and became the main stem of East Asian painting.

According to Mi Fu(米芾), Su Shi(蘇軾) drew Ink bamboo(墨竹) "directly from ground to the very top." When Mi Fu asked him why he did not split the bamboo joints, Su Shi replied "How can a bamboo possibly grow joint by joint from the very beginning?" Also, one day when a man saw Su Shi drawing a red bamboo and thought it was odd, Su Shi then retorted that if the man had ever seen a black bamboo. The way of drawing a bamboo straight up from the ground and then depicting the joints by marking a dot is derived from the observation of natural ecology. The red bamboo is a refusal to the ideality of invariably drawing bamboo with black ink. In the formation of literati painting cultivating one's mind continuously in everyday life through innovative and creative ideas along with paintings, like the examples above, was important.

As can be seen in the word 'literati', literati painting focuses on human qualities to put one's efforts into a field of study, which is a repository of human 'culture', and into building one's character so as to fulfill the Tao. In these qualities, as well as a rational cognitive, emotional cognitive and expression, comprehensive experience of life are integrated and operated. The saying "10,000 books in the heart, eyes beholding the rare masterpieces of the previous generation, and the wheel marks and hoof prints of wagon covering half the world. A man can then set his brush" shows it directly. On the left is **<Various studies> (fig. 10)**, drawings by the great Renaissance painter and highest rated genius among human civilization, Leonardo da Vinci, whose drawings are the examples of 'Neo-Renaissance' which the modern admires. On the right is **<BuYiSeonRan(不二禪兰)> (fig. 11)** by the great scholar and an artist Kim Jeong-hui(金正喜) of 18th century Korea. The two pictures both have writings and paintings



fig.10) Leonardo da Vinci, Various studies



fig.11) Kim Jeong-hui, BuYiSeonRan

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in a single screen. Had it not been for Leonardo da Vinci's numerous research projects with pictures, would have da Vinci still be regarded as creative genius of consilience? Writings and paintings complement each other, giving each other synergies. Kim Jeong-hui wrote some things in the painting of somewhat 'preposterously' drawn orchid, which are exquisitely harmonized with the images. Leonardo da Vinci, though he had knowledge of the humanities, placed more emphasis on rational application of science in art. However, what East Asia wanted was the 'vitality' of a 'human being' to unify with nature. Therefore, poetry and literature were in literati paintings, not the scientific investigation or method. The formation of Northern Song dynasty literary artist contains the popularization of art, in the way that paintings began to be widely recognized as liberal arts for the intellectuals, prior to the concept that only 'court painter' and the professional painters can paint the picture. In the West, during the 18th century the separation between fine art and crafts is done. Since modernism, the ideal of an artist consists of the common features- liberty, imagination, originality- in the fine art system. The genre that best meets this concept of the Western fine art in the East will be literati paintings. Just like Western art separated fine art from crafts and then combine literature, music, painting, sculpture into fine art, the literati were seeking poetry, calligraphy and paintings altogether from their art. These three were the highest virtues that an intellect should have. And they also left numerous painting theories that includes art aesthetic. As East Asian philosophy of life was coupled with the problems of life, so was art closely linked to life, and in this respect the literati paintings have a different point of view from the Western fine art. The literati wanted to receive help from the arts about their philosophy and life, also wanted to 'train their moral(修身)' through art. Their art wasn't a pursuit of supreme 'aesthetic beauty.' Through Literati paintings we are able to understand the harmonious blend of art and philosophy of life and how it was unraveled by creative thinking, also how the practice had continued in the midst of life.

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¹¹ Zhang Fa, *East, West and Aesthetics*, Purunsoop, 2002, pp.40~42.

² Panofsky, E., *IDEA*, Yekyong, 2005, p.21.

³ Kim, Young Oak, *Lao-Tzu and 21st century*, Tongnamu, 1999, pp.120~192.

⁴ Zang Fa, *Ibid.*, pp.42~50.