

Of Moon and Man A Close Look at Chinese Landscape Painting

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China

Since antiquity the moon has been considered one of the most attractive elements of nature, and men have often been depicted pondering its light. In China, the 'literati viewing the moon' is an often-cited stereotype in works of art. Jeonghee Lee-Kalisch, an expert in East Asian art history, discusses this specific genre of poetry and landscape painting.

By Ricarda Daberkow

The moon has long held special significance in Chinese popular mythology, and as such has been depicted in numerous works of literature and art. Its smooth, reflective surface was said to be the home of animals like the rabbit and the toad. It was also considered an island paradise floating in the skies – a dreamland. In the eighth century the imagery of the moon changed, becoming a residence of the legendary Queen Mother of the West, perhaps under the influence of Western ideas that came to China by way of Buddhism.

Based on an investigation of poetry, and ninety landscapes from the Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, Jeonghee Lee-Kalisch's *Das Licht der Edlen* (*junzi zhi guang*); (English: Light of Nobles) gives an insight into the relationship between the illuminated celestial body and its male observers. The primary aim of this study is to pursue this relationship, and as a result the author deals with questions that revolve around men. What were the noblemen pondering on, or dreaming of, while gazing upon the moon? What kind of associations with the moon did they have? Lee-Kalisch also examines the stage names



Taken from the book under review.

Ill. 13 from Sun Kehong (1532-1610). *Yueshang* (Rising moon). Section of a hanging scroll 'Delectations for leisure hours'. Ink and colour on paper. 28 cm. Gugong Bowuyuan, Taipei.

(bi) of individual painters and literati, in order to communicate an idea of their relationship with the moon.

Through an investigation of literary patterns, mainly from Tang period poetry, the author shows that the purity of the moon is associated with the pure and chaste heart of the noble. Du Fu, Li Bai, and Tang Taizong describe typical situations whereby literati gather together on a terrace near the water, watching the moon, drinking wine, and playing the flute or zither. They describe solitary men viewing the moon, sitting in a boat floating on the river. These people are portrayed dreaming of leaving society and its rigid structure behind, searching for freedom of spirit and body, and even immortality.

The second part of this study accentuates the formal composition, and focuses on the characteristics of moonlit landscapes, with and without men viewing the moon. Lee-Kalisch concentrates on the compositional element of an invisible line between the person and the moon. By using schematic drawings the author is able to show the clear preference of painters, up to the Ming period, for a diagonal line between the viewer and the moon. This stereoscopic effect enables art works to become more vivid. A vertical line between the moon and its viewer is often used to intensify the distancing effect of the composition. Frequently, depictions of literati, the moon and a third element, such as flying birds or another person, form a triangle.

How the moon and its emitted light are represented in the paintings is another important part of this research. Is there reflection of the moonlight? How are shadows dealt with? The author points out that questions such as these, that European painters stress, are neglected by Chinese artists. They emphasize, not a naturalistic representation of a moonlit landscape, but rather the manifestation of the essential, the *qi*, of the moon. In comparison with Western realism with its representations of changing light, Chinese artists use synaesthesia: In Chinese art, inscriptions on the painting or the title are used to highlight the intention of the painter. A circle in a fair sky will evoke the perception of a moonlit landscape at nighttime. The means of representation – be it colour, ink or lapis – is secondary. Nonetheless, the publication would have been more complete if it had provided the reader with colour, and not only black-and-white illustrations.

As a whole this work, although interesting, unfortunately is too narrow. The whole complex of animals, plants, and beautiful women in moonlight, as well as representations of the moon in religious paintings is omitted in this study. This is unfortunate but understandable considering the enormous range of material researched in undertaking this analysis. As such this text can only be intended as an overview or an introduction to the topic. It provides the reader

with a wide range of material and is a solid basis for further research. ◀

Lee-Kalisch, Jeonghee, *Das Licht der Edlen* (*junzi zhi guang*). *Der Mond in der chinesischen Landschaftsmalerei*, Monumenta Serica Monograph Series XLVIII, Sankt Augustin, Nettetal: Institut Monumenta Serica (2001), pp. 266, ISBN 3-8050-0457-5, German.

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Differentiation and Integration in Daoism

A member of the Ba minority in South-West China in the second century CE, a female poet of the Tang dynasty, an elite scholar-official of the Ming, and a priest in present-day Taiwan – what do these people have in common? One commonality between the four is that they are 'Daoists', either self-styled or labelled so by others. But what is 'Daoist' about all these people of different times, places, professions, sexes, and cultures? What defines their 'Daoist identity'?

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By Paul van Els

Previous studies into Daoist identity have often departed from the dated definition of 'identity'. The identity of a religious tradition, according to this definition, is its essence, or those essential features that remain unchanged throughout its different manifestations. As Christian identity can be accordingly characterized as the belief in one God and in Jesus as his this-worldly representative, Daoism may be explained as the belief in the Dao and the worship of Laozi, the Old Master, as its founder. However, this definition fails to explain the plurality of identities under the Daoist umbrella.

Inspired by the theories of the theologian and anthropologist Hans Mol, the editors of and contributors to this work interpret identity not as a static entity but as a dynamic process. Rather than focusing on the 'permanence and solidity in the tradition', they emphasize the 'continuous interaction of the two forces of differentiation and integration' (pp.7–8): in other words, the process of how identity, on the one hand, changes through political and economical developments and through adoption of elements from other traditions (*differentiation*) and, on the other, aspires for stability and continuity (*integration*). Stability and continuity are achieved by setting up – what Mol distinguishes as – belief systems, lineage lines, rituals, and myths.

Part I, 'Early Formations', of this volume on Daoist identity discusses Great Peace and Celestial Masters, two movements that have been crucial in the creation of a Daoist identity. Parts II to IV deal with the first three aspects distinguished by Mol; part II, 'Texts and Symbols', contains articles on the formation of Daoist belief systems; part III, 'Lineages and Local Culture', studies Daoist

lineages vis-à-vis local and popular cults; and part IV, 'Ritual Boundaries', concentrates on the formation and reinforcement of Daoist identity through ritual. Contributions to this volume vary in degree of specialization and relevance to the topic at issue. Particularly relevant and enlightening articles include the following.

Kleeman (ch. 1) focuses on the interaction between ethnic identity and Daoist identity in traditional China. He shows how the Daoist tradition has absorbed elements of religious belief systems of minorities; how, conversely, ethnic groups have embraced Daoism; and how, interestingly, a number of traditional expressions of Daoist identity, such as priesthood and certain religious institutions, have survived only in minority belief systems and not in those of ethnic Chinese Daoists.

Yu Xuanji, the Tang dynasty poetess, courtesan, and Daoist nun, is the focus of Cahill's contribution (ch. 5). Yu, executed at age 25 for murdering her maid, is a controversial figure in Chinese history; up until the present day she has served as a bad example of feminine misbehaviour. Cahill ignores stories about Yu's life and lets her poetry speak of her identity. Three images that repeatedly appear in Yu's poems are clothing, boats, and zithers. The second image most clearly reveals her Daoist identity. The boat – that is, the poet herself – takes Yu 'from one place to another, one state of consciousness to another, and one condition of existence to another. She moves from city to country, public to private, courtesan to recluse. She floats along through life and change, entrusting herself to the Dao.' (p. 116).

Mabuchi (ch. 6) discusses the Daoist identity of Wang Dao, an elite scholar-official of the Ming dynasty (generally known as a Confucian era) and a student of Wang Yangming (the eminent neo-Confucian thinker). Operating in Confucian surroundings, Wang Dao maintains that Confucius and Laozi express the same ideas and differ only in wording. Wang regards Daoist notions such as *dao* (the Way) and *de* (virtue) as roots, and Confucian terms such as *ren* (benevolence) and *yi* (righteousness) as branches. He criticizes the way that people focus on branches instead of on roots and advocates the Dao as a source of a deeper goodness. Despite his undeniable sympathy

for Buddhist and Confucian thought, his ideas and his commentary on the *Laozi* disclose his Daoist identity and make him 'a relevant voice in the history of Daoist thought.' (p. 144).

Both Maruyama (ch. 12) and Asano (ch. 13) call into focus Daoist rituals in present-day Taiwan, the former discussing legal documents used in Daoist rituals of merit. The use of such documents distinguishes these rituals from Buddhist, Confucian, and popular rites, which lack such a textual practice. Asano discusses offerings in Daoist ritual, likewise by distinguishing it from other rites. The two forces of differentiation and integration are clearly visible in his example of meat-offering in Daoism. Though officially proscribed by the Daoist tradition, meat-offerings practiced in folk religion and in Confucian rites made their way into Daoism by popular demand. Nonetheless, Daoists deliberately keep meat-offerings in the periphery and assign it far less importance than other components of offering – such as incense, flowers, tea, or fruit – thus reassuring stability and continuity.

In the end, what is 'Daoist identity'? The tenor of this book is that no univocal answer to this question exists. Each Daoist interprets and manifests his or her Daoist identity in a unique way. As Shiga concludes, they identify themselves as 'Daoist' based on their own idea about what Daoism is (p. 206). The book thus deconstructs the idea of the Daoist identity and proposes a Daoist identity that accommodates innumerable individual identities. This novel approach surely is an asset, but also raises questions. For example, such terms as 'Daoism' or 'the Daoist religion' seem to suggest that there exists a 'core' identity with various manifestations. But how to determine this core if practitioners are free to establish their identity through differentiation and integration (leading, in one case, to abstinence of meat, to performance of meat-offerings in another)? Nonetheless, *Daoist Identity* is a refreshing and interesting read that stimulates further discussion. ◀

Kohn, Livia and Harold D. Roth, (eds.), *Daoist Identity: History, Lineage, and Ritual*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press (2002), pp. x+333, ISBN 0-8248-2504-7.

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