Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Social Psychology and Humanity Studies
DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.ND19501

Landscape and Shadow: A Comparison of the View of Nature and Philosophy of Art in the Artworks of Fan Kuan and J. M. W. Turner

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Abstract: In Chinese and Western painting, respectively, there are apparent differences in the representation of the vision of nature and the philosophy of art, even though paintings carry nature as their theme in art history. The extent of these differences can be well understood by comparing works of different artists from diverse cultures. The case selected for analysis in this paper comprises the Chinese Northern Song period painter Fan Kuan and the British Romantic painter J. M. W. Turner. This paper compares and contrasts the two artists regarding their perceptions of nature and aesthetic systems. Various perspectives of nature can be explained by works like Fan Kuan's *Travelers Among Mountains and Streams* and William Turner's *The Blizzard* or *Snowstorm*. This paper uses a qualitative research approach to understand how the two painters depict their understanding of the topic through their creativity. Many of the works painted by Fan Kuan illustrate the Confucianistic notion of 'heaven-men unity', focusing on such aspects of nature as peacefulness and timelessness. On the other hand, Turner in his paintings responds to the relation of the age of romance to the force of light, the force of colours, Turner responds to this power of the age. The study findings reveal that though the two painters had a clear distinction based on their cultural origin, style, and thought on philosophical matters, both the painters had artistic interpretations of the natural world in their use of artistic forms.

Keywords: Fan Kuan, J. M. W. Turner, philosophy of art, landscape painting.

1. Introduction

To compare the views of nature and the philosophy of art of Northern Song Chinese painter Fan Kuan and British Romantic painter J.M.W Turner, this research will examine works of art produced by both artists. Fan Kuan is a typical image of a traditional Chinese landscape painting, and Turner is an image of a Romantic landscape painting in England. The great art historian James Cahill noted that Chinese landscape painting is not a copy of the external, tangible landscape but an artist internal landscape expression based on the Chinese painter's humility and admiration of the forces of the natural world [1]. Comparing the concept of nature featured in cross cultural art offers a better point of understanding the difference between the two art forms [2].

This work is of tremendous importance to scholars and is very informative in enlightening us on the distinctions observed by the Chinese and Westerners in their perception of nature. Turner's

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DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.ND19501

landscapes broke the so-called pattern of Western landscape painting, thus encouraging the development of new art languages [3]. Through a comparative study of the works of these two artists, a deeper understanding can be gained of the different legacies of Chinese and Western philosophies of art and views of nature.

This study develops mainly from the three aspects of the concept of nature, the philosophy of art, and its creative techniques in the works of Fan Kuan and Turner. The literature analysis method was used to search and read relevant academic materials and research literature. The advantage of the literature analysis method is that it can systematically and comprehensively collate the research results of the previous researchers, thus helping us to deeply explore the cultural connotations in the works of the two artists. Fan Kuan's '*Travelers Among Mountains and Streams'* and Mountains demonstrates the timelessness and serenity of nature through profound compositions and brush and ink techniques, while works such as Turner's The Tempest highlight Romanticism's reverence for the power and emotion of nature through the expression of light and shadow. The ultimate goal of this study is to uncover the commonalities and differences between Fang Kuan and Turner in their views of nature and philosophical expressions of art and to provide new perspectives for cross-cultural comparisons of art. To achieve this goal, this paper, through in-depth analyses of Fan Kuan's and Turner's masterpieces, demonstrates the two artists' unique interpretations of nature in different cultural contexts.

2. Background

In Chinese and Western art history, landscape and scenery painting have been necessary for artists to express their concepts of nature. Although both take nature as their subject matter, there are significant differences in their methods of expression, creative ideas, and cultural backgrounds. Chinese landscape painting gradually became independent in the Tang Dynasty and peaked in the Song Dynasty, emphasizing the harmony and spirituality of man and nature through depicting natural landscapes. In contrast, Western landscape painting became independent only after the Renaissance, especially by the 18th century, when, under the influence of picturesque aesthetics, landscape painting became an art form that realistically presented natural landscapes. In China, landscape painting is a reproduction of natural landscapes and an understanding and expression of the order of heaven and earth [4]. These works depict natural scenes and construct a unique spiritual world through ink and brushwork, giving the viewer a profound visual and spiritual experience. Especially in the Song Dynasty, the landscape painters, represented by Fan Kuan, expressed the concept of 'unity of heaven and man' through brush and ink techniques and grand compositions. The viewer can feel the serenity and eternity of nature in their works.

In contrast, Western landscapes reflect more human control and realistic reproduction of nature. J. M. W. Turner, as a representative painter of 19th-century British Romanticism, expressed the power of nature and the intertwining of emotions through the ingenious use of light and colour. His artworks, such as *The Blizzard or Snowstorm*, display nature's magnificence and convey a sense of awe and reverence for it. Turner's concept of creation was influenced by the picturesque aesthetics of the 18th century, and he highlighted the drama and dynamism of nature through the effects of light and shadow in his images, which perfectly combined the transience of nature with the ebb and flow of human emotions [5].

The differences between Chinese and Western art in terms of the concept of nature stem from their respective unique cultural backgrounds. Traditional Chinese culture emphasizes the harmony between man and nature, and landscape painters sublimate natural landscapes into a spiritual realm by cultivating qi through emptiness and tranquillity and by unimpeded expression of the spirit. Considered the pinnacle of Song Dynasty landscape painting, Fan Kuan's '*Travelers Among Mountains and Streams*' demonstrates the harmonious coexistence of humanity and nature through

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the skilful use of brush and ink techniques and majestic compositions. Western landscape painting was more influenced by scientific thinking, especially in post-Renaissance Europe, where artists began to reproduce natural landscapes through mathematical logic and perspective. J. M. W. Turner's works express the Romantic period artist's reverence for nature and the depth of his emotions. Turner not only conveyed a deep perception of the power of nature through light, shadow and colour but also expressed the strong impact of his feelings through his works.

This study aims to analyze similarities and contrasts between the Chinese landscape painter Fan Kuan and the English Romantic painter Turner concerning their opinion on the role of nature and their art concepts. The comparative study enhances the understanding of the conception of nature in China and the West and brings new perspectives for studying relations between Chinese and Western art. Fan Kuan and Turner, in their subjects and works, are representatives of two cultures, showing the authors' comprehension of the world of nature concerning their peculiar aesthetic imagery. [6]

3. Fan Kuan's View of Nature and Philosophy of Art

As a master of landscape painting during the Northern Song Dynasty, Fan Kuan's masterpiece '*Travelers Among Mountains and Streams*' is not only highly innovative in technique but also demonstrates his deep understanding of all things in heaven and earth and his unique view of nature through the depiction of natural landscapes. Fan Kuan's view of nature is deeply influenced by the traditional Chinese idea of 'The Unity of Heaven and Man', which emphasizes the harmonious coexistence of human beings and nature and considers nature to be the continuation and externalization of the human spirit. In the artworks, Xing and Magnificence of Nature are represented by Fan Kuan. However, he conveys his inner philosophy through coloring, aerography, and the textural use of his brush and ink techniques; he depicts a spirit that is soother than reality.

Unlike the previous work, in '*Travelers Among Mountains and Streams*', Fan Kuan shows the grandeur and elevation of the northern mountains and rivers through broad composition. The mountains in the picture tower over the clouds, occupying most of the canvas and giving a strong visual impact. This composition is known as the 'monumental' composition, extremely shocking. In terms of technique, Fan Kuan used a variety of chapping techniques, the most famous of which is the 'raindrop chapping', a method that expresses the grain and texture of the rocks and stones using densely dotted brushstrokes, enhancing the three-dimensionality and spatiality of the picture. In addition, Fan Kuan adopts the technique of scattered perspective in his works, creating a sense of spatial depth and dynamism through the switching of multiple viewpoints, making the images both majestic and dynamic. In addition, Fan Kuan demonstrated his deep understanding of the natural order and showed the view of nature in traditional Chinese culture through his delicate depictions of rocks, streams, and waterfalls [7].

Fan Kuan's works not only reproduce natural scenes but also explore the order of heaven and earth. In '*Travelers Among Mountains and Streams*', he conveys the aesthetic concept 'Vividness and Vibrancy', a principle derived from the 'Six Methods' of the ancient Chinese painting theorist Xie He, which emphasizes the expression of the vitality and vigour of nature through art. Through the skilful use of brush and ink and the composition of reality and falsehood, it creates an artistic mood that transcends reality so that the viewer not only feels the majesty and grandeur of nature.

Fan Kuan's artistic philosophy is embodied in the depiction of nature and is closely related to the ideology of Song Dynasty science. Song Dynasty science focused on rational thinking about all things in heaven and earth, emphasizing the relationship between the Tao of nature and the universe. Fan Kuan integrated this idea into his creations, sublimating natural landscapes into spiritual realms through fine brushwork and layered compositions. As he said, 'I would rather learn from the heart than from things,' which reflects that he not only imitated nature but also expressed his understanding of the world through his paintings.

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According to Mr. Jao Tsung-I, Chinese landscape painting is a visual expression and a way of conveying ideas. Fan Kuan's works embody the Chinese cultural concept of 'unity of man and nature'. Fan Kuan's view of nature reflects his artistic pursuits and represents the Chinese traditional culture's reverence for nature and the pursuit of harmony [8]. In 'Travelers in the Mountains and Streams', Fan Kuan demonstrated the pinnacle of Northern Song landscape painting through his technique, creating a new height for Chinese landscape painting with his profound view of nature and artistic philosophy. His works are innovative and unique in technique and integrate the spiritual pursuit of Song Dynasty philosophy and traditional culture in their ideology, becoming an unsurpassable peak in the history of Chinese landscape painting.

4. Turner's View of Nature and Philosophy of Art

J.M.W. Turner's view of nature and philosophy of art occupied an essential position in the development of Romantic landscape painting in the 19th century, and he expressed his reverence for nature and emotional mingling through his unique treatment of natural light, shadow, and colour.

Turner's view of nature shows a sense of awe and reverence for nature. He is adept at capturing nature's ever-changing light and colours and expresses nature's unpredictability and mystery with dynamic brushstrokes. For instance, his major work, *The Blizzard*, shows the violent force of the sea in gusty wind and rain and shrinks the confrontation between man and nature into insignificance. This representation of the power of nature is not only 'realistic,' but rather it 'realizes' a subject's vision of the world, stressing that nature-power and person-emotion are not easily separable.

The major components in Turner's work include light and colour. In handling the light and shadow, Turner makes a misty and lyrical painting. In 'Rain, Steam and Speed', he manipulates light, shade, and colours to depict an aspect of modern age developments and the destruction of the natural world. This makes his works not only portray light, darkness and colour, but also liberation of the romantic and sentimental. Nature in Turner's works is somewhat nebulous, and the distinctions between the subject and its environment and the rather vigorous strokes create the illusion of the vast number of shades of nature that become one with man's passion in the hazy pictures.

Turner's artistic philosophy profoundly embodies the intermingling of personal emotions and nature during the Romantic period. His works not only expressed reverence for nature but also conveyed a profound reflection of human emotions through depicting natural landscapes. As in the case of works such as *Light and Colour - After the Flood*, he expresses the powerlessness and awe of human beings in the face of nature through exaggerated colours. Turner not only focuses on the external image of nature but also tries to explore the philosophical relationship between man and nature by exploring this artistic expression beyond the simple reproduction of the landscape, reflecting his deep understanding of the power of nature and emotional resonance [9].

Another element of Turner's art practice is also his approach to painting. He demonstrated the switching of the scenery in real life and the blending of truth and lies through using local fast brushstrokes and layering of the same colours multiple times. In light and shade colours and general treatment of the piece, Turner has succeeded in enhancing the pictorial value of this picture and adding significant emotion to the work. As for details of the images, they are usually introduced into the environment; the art of painting, outlined in variations of light and colour, exudes a romantic spirit and has the author's distinct manner. This artistic style was a veritable point that influenced the future of Impressionist painters.

In conclusion, the vision of Turner to nature and the philosophy of art embodied was the cult of the powerful ability of nature and the final identification of a complex of sentiments with the illumination of light and shade and with colour. His artworks are not only the portrayal of the natural scenery but also philosophical discussions about man's interaction with nature during the Romantics. Using his painting methods, Turner combined the majesty and otherness of nature with emotion,

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broadening the meaning of landscape painting and offering even more essential inspiration to the later impressionists whose perception of nature and manner of depicting it are still considered the final word in Romanticism.

5. Comparison

5.1. Comparison of Philosophy of Art

Information about the art philosophies of Fan Kuan and J. M. W. Turner shows that they express different conceptions of nature based on Chinese and Western traditions. Fan Kuan's art philosophy is rooted in the traditional Chinese concept of 'the unity of heaven and mankind', which advocates that nature and humanity are inseparable wholes and that artists should convey the order and harmony of nature through their paintings. Fan Kuan, in his piece, '*Travelers Among Mountains and Streams*,' gives a strong sense of stability and timelessness through his magnificent composition and subtle strokes. These works have produced a landscape and recreated a scene of actual nature, and they are vivid illustrations of the mind where truth and philosophy of nature exist. Fan Kuan's brush strokes and techniques, such as 'raindrop chapping', reveal the inner structure of natural landscapes and create a quiet and profound spiritual world through panoramic compositions. This form of expression embodies the Song Dynasty rationalist's 'to understand things' - through in-depth observation of nature, to understand the way of heaven and earth .

Unlike Fan Kuan, who focused on the harmony and order of nature, Turner's art philosophy embodied more of Romanticism's emotional colours. Turner expressed the power and unpredictability of nature through dynamic changes in light and colour. Nature, to him, is not just an external landscape but a dynamic existence closely linked to human emotions. In his works *The Blizzard* and *Snowstorm*, *Steam and Speed*, Turner dramatizes nature's fury and the industrial revolution's impact on nature. His art not only focuses on the physical phenomena of nature but also expresses a sense of humanity's fragility and powerlessness in the face of nature through his unique treatment of light and colour. Turner viewed nature as a being of flux and power. Through his paintings, he explored the relationship between man and nature and reflected on the destruction of nature in the age of industrialization .[10]

5.2. Comparison of Concepts of Nature

In regard to the perspective of nature, Fan Kuan's painting portrays nature as eternal existence, while Turner portrays nature as transient. In terms of artwork, Fan Kuan's paintings of landscape focus on the conception of the calmness of nature and the unity of man with nature, and man can see the spirituality in great power beyond reality through static images. For Turner, taste shows a lack of control over the processes of painting and revealing light and color, and nature, in its manifestations, demonstrates the inferiority of human beings compared to nature. His works reveal the intertwining of nature's immense power and human emotions through exaggerated expression, contrasting with Fan Kuan's serenity and harmony.

5.3. Comparative Philosophy of Art

At the level of art philosophy, however, it seems that in his views of natural landscapes, Fan Kuan is more concerned with conveying a philosophical point of view and concentrates more on the feeling or the calmness conveyed by his paintings. His works touch on the idea of the harmonized world and the unity of the Earth; he glorifies the spirit of nature and acknowledges the subordinate order of life with his elegant and vast paintings. Turner's work is more about portraying the gestures of individual feelings, especially the disposition of nature, through gained and lost tones. They are filled with

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passions and emergent pathos variations – the play between heavenly and earthly forces and basic human feelings [10].

In general, the differences between Fan Kuan's and Turner's views of nature and philosophy of art reflect the different cultural backgrounds and artistic traditions of China and the West. Although Fan Kuan focused on the balanced interaction between man and nature through static representation, Turner attempted to reveal the interlink between natural elements and human feelings and passions through dynamic representation. Consequently, the difference in art theories to which the two authors contribute offers a crucial comparative angle to analyze the evolution of Chinese and Western art.

6. Conclusion

This paper demonstrates striking contrasts in the perception of nature and aesthetics between Fan Kuan and Turner, explained by their differences in Chinese and Western cultural roots when creating their artworks. Many paintings of Fan Kuan are inspired by Confucianism's concept of 'heaven and man', the unity of man and nature, and the harmonious relationship between man and the environment, peace, and eternity, which are synonymous with any Chinese landscape composition. In contrast, Turner portrayed light, shade, and intense color as Romanticism interests that emphasize the force and passion in nature. This difference is also due to the difference in creative ideas of the two great artists, and it also shows the appreciation of Chinese and Western art forms from the view of nature. This research sheds fresh light on how different Chinese and Western artists perceived the nature and philosophy of art and helps further cross-cultural study on at in the age of globalization and art Sino-westernization. It explains the interconnection between nature and human feelings and philosophical ideas.

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