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Envisioning the World Within or Without Limits: on Representation and Creativity in the Aesthetics of 17th Century China

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Abstract: This essay examines a number of statements on painting and visual perception by Chinese literati artists of the late Ming – early Qing periods. It argues that the approaches to pictorial representation and creativity entailed in these statements reveal a considerable impact of Buddhist theories of consciousness. In the theories analyzed, pictorial representation is discussed in terms of ways and modes of how the mind relates to the world. As will be demonstrated, the function of expressing cognitive organization in representation is given more prominence than the function of rendering an external reality. The view of pictorial representation as being essentially what the mind produces in its relation to the world provides a basis for the assumption of a fundamental affinity between the creation of an image and the process how phenomenal reality unfolds by virtue of cognitive operations. This assumption seems to broadly underpin the painting theories discussed. And it is this assumption that provides a clue how and why the literati artists adopt Buddhist theories of cognition to the understanding of art. In the last section of the essay, we turn to the sources which cast still another perspective on artistic practice, namely a practice which captures a single moment of pure direct perception.

Keywords: illusion; image; moment of perception; reality

1 World as picture, picture as world

In the second fascicle (*juan* 卷) of his *Miscellanea from the Studio of the Purple Peach-Tree* (*Zitao xuan zazhui* 紫桃軒雜綴, c. 1617) Li Rihua 李日華 (1565–1635)[1] describes the composition of a landscape painting as follows:

1 Scholar-official, lay Buddhist, painter and art critic of the late Ming-Dynasty. For information about his life and work see Goodrich and Fang (eds.) 1976: 826–830, Li 1987, and Brook 2012.

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Generally, paintings have three levels.
The first one is the place which the self occupies. In general, places where the body is situated [should] not be narrow and dense, but [should] expand widely, as in the case when several scenes come together in a place on the bank of a watercourse or at the bottom of a grove.
The second [level] is that which the eye sees: it may be a strange, marvelous realm, or it may be the vague distance, as in the case of springs flowing downwards and clouds rising or sails drifting and birds flying away.
The third [level] is where the mind roams, as in the case when the veins of sensibility (*qing mai*) are not severed, although the power of the eyes get exhausted.
Naturally there are such areas [in the painting], which are left undone.
For instance, while painting a tree or a rock, there should be places, where the attitude is captured by sketchy points and ink-washes;
[or for instance] while painting a long scenery, there should be such areas which only the mind can reach, but the brush does not. These are places imbued with spiritual energy.
[The distinction of] what is there and what is not is neglected on purpose, for it is probably impossible not to neglect it.
This is what has been called "phenomena of extreme distance" and "phenomena of extreme reduction" by the *Faxiang* school.
凡畫有三次第:
一曰身之所容, 凡置身處非邃密即曠朗, 水邊林下多景所湊處是也。
二曰目之所矚也, 或奇勝或渺迷, 泉落雲生, 帆移鳥去是也。
三曰意之所遊, 目力雖窮而情脈不斷是也。然有所忽處, 如寫一樹一石必有草草點染取態處。
寫長景必有意到筆不到, 爲神氣所吞處。
是非有心于忽蓋不得不忽也。
其於佛法相宗所云極迥色極略色之謂也。[2]

Li Rihua's account sets out with the remark that the division of the pictorial structure into three levels is a general (*fan* 凡) practice in painting. Indeed, threefold division of a pictorial space into a ground, a middle and a distant level is one of the typical compositional models for many landscape paintings in China as well as in the West. However, on closer examination it may be noticed that Li Rihua's description not only touches upon composition. Rather, the order of pictorial spatiality and the phenomenal character of a landscape is put into correlation with certain perceptual conditions:[3] the description starts from a scenery

2 Li Rihua, *Zitao*: 287.

3 In this sense Li Rihua's "three levels" are reminiscent of a classification of mountains-and-waters (*shanshui* 山水) scenery by the Song-dynasty painter and theorist Guo Xi 郭熙 (ca. 1020–ca. 1090): "Among mountains-and-waters there are those in which one can travel; those that can be contemplated; those in which one can roam; and those in which one can dwell" (山水有可行者, 有可望者, 有可游者, 有可居者) (Guo Xi, *Linquan*: 632). While the relationship between a landscape and kinds of activity in this statement is similar to the one we find in Li's theory, Li makes a significant shift in defining this relationship: what he is concerned with is not which activity one can perform regarding the landscape, but rather the way how the scenery unfolds by virtue of a certain mode of perception. For a phenomenologically oriented interpretation of Guo Xi's theory of

as perceived through the bodily senses on the first level, to progress, on the second level, to the space that unfolds in vision, eventually merging into a vast spatiality of mental roaming about on the third level.

Let us examine these levels one by one with respect to how each spatial register of the landscape is matched with corresponding perceptual or cognitive modes.

On the first level the immediate environment of *bodily* presence (*shen zhi suo rong* 身之所容) is focused: One can imagine oneself (or a scholar) in an area, which is not dense, but wide (*fei sui mi ji kuang lang* 非邃密即曠朗), sitting at a bank beneath a grove (*shui bian lin xia* 水邊林下), observing the scenery around.

The remark that different scenes converge at this location (*duo jing suo cou chu* 多景所湊處) signals a curious reversion of the relationship between the observer and the observed: It is not that the observation "issues" from the observer, but rather, sceneries that can be observed "reach" the place of observation.[4] Observation, i.e. the visual activity *per se*, has not yet started at this level, rather, the environment – not yet parsed by the viewer in a particular way – presents itself in the richness of objects that potentially can be focalized.

At the second level spatiality is focused, which appears in *vision* (*suo zhu* 所矚) and cannot be physically reached. "Curious attractions" (*qi sheng* 奇勝), evasive, not quite reified objects in the distant space capture one's sight. It is worth stressing here that the structure of visual space is not provided by the materiality or qualitative parameters of the objects, but rather by their fluid motion. This motion erects a clear three-dimensional geometry with the directions away from the observer into the distance (*niao qu* 鳥去, "birds flying away"), along the horizontal plane (*fan yi* 帆移, "sails drifting by") and the vertical directions up and down (*quan luo yun sheng* 泉落雲生, "waterfalls rushing down and clouds rising up").

From the receding visual spatiality, there is a gradual transition to the invisible and barely depictable third level. Before turning to a description of it, two more remarks with regard to the visual level are in order, since they help to clarify the role of visuality in the overall construction of pictorial space.

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art see Obert 2007: 331–362 and 520 seq. For a comparison of the older (i.a. Guo Xi's) and of 17th c. views on painting structure see Lukicheva, forthcoming.

4 Cf. George Lakoff's 1995: 135 insight concerning sentences where "the perceiver is understood to be a receiver rather than a source": "The PERCEPTION IS RECEPTION metaphor conceptualized the perceiver as a perceptual receiver, while the from-phrase conceptualizes the perceiver as a perceptual source".

To begin with, the evasiveness of the images in the distant visual realm obliterates the difference between "real" and imagined objects and reveals an essentially imaginary nature of what is considered as being seen.

Secondly, the use of the character *zhu* 矚 for 'seeing' in the analyzed quotation is significant. Uncommon in the writings on landscape painting,[5] *zhu* can be found in Buddhist texts, where it denotes the act of focusing something in what is taken as an *external* space. Thus the *zhu*-kind of seeing signals a mode of vision – irrelevant from the perspective of the Buddhist sources – which implies a distinction between an inner and outer space. It involves a subject-object dichotomy and assigns a mediating role between the subject and the object to the sight. In such a model of vision, the external world is assumed to be there, hence the possibility of being reached by the sight, or, simply, of being seen.[6]

From the evasive visual realm of the second level Li Rihua's account proceeds to the third level, where only the mental consciousness[7] roams (*yi zhi suo you* 意之所遊), that is the realm of *mental contents*. Although Li Rihua describes this vast realm as being beyond the perceptual reach even for vision (*mu li sui qiong* 目力雖窮) and thus devoid from the sensorial and formal bounding as encountered on the former two levels, he still mentions the "veins of sensibility" which do not get severed (*qing mai bu duan* 情脈不斷) even on the third level. The mental roaming thus follows certain patterns which are prefigured by the sensorial conditions of the preceding levels. In this way, the "veins" feature as something which connects the three levels and provides continuity for the whole pictorial structure.[8] But the veins are not just a physical property of the picture or of the landscape: as Li uses the word *qing* in conjunction with "veins"[9] he emphasizes that they are derived

5 For painting theories another word for 'looking afar' – *wang* 望 – seems to be far more common.

6 Cf. for example the usage of *zhu* in the dialogue on the ways of seeing and cognition between the Buddha and Ananda in *j*.1 of the *Śūraṅgama-sūtra* (T 945: 1.107a18–107a20).

7 That is, *manovijñāna*. See next page for the explanation.

8 Note the remarkable difference of the principles such continuity is built upon vis-à-vis the principles of linear perspective which construct a homogeneous geometrical space in European classical painting.

9 This collocation calls for attention. Whereas *qing mai* is rather unusual in pictorial theory, there are several occurrences of the expression *long mai* ('dragon veins') in the theories of painting of the 17th century. The latter reflects an old geomantic (*fengshui* 風水) notion of a landscape as a living organism intrinsically connected by continuous lines, that is 'veins'. Li Rihua's substitution of *long* ('dragon') by *qing* ('feelings, emotions', 'response to certain circumstances, attributes, features') seems to mark a shift from the understanding of 'veins' as features of the landscape emphasizing the intentional content in the perception of it.

from the observer's psychological state and that all three levels are related within a single *psycho*physical disposition.

In the last sentence of the passage regarding the areas in the picture which cannot be painted, but only "mentally reached" (*yi dao bi bu dao* 意到筆不到), Li Rihua mentions two concepts from the Buddhist *Faxiang*-School 法相宗 (School of Dharma Characteristics, a.k.a. *weishizong* 唯識宗, or Consciousness-Only-School):[10] The "phenomena of extreme distance" (*ji jiong se* 極迥色) and the "phenomena of extreme reduction" (*ji lüe se* 極略色). The former notion refers to smallest elements of atmospheric light and darkness, color, shade, and of other immaterial substances, including the void, while the latter denotes elementary particles of solid matter.[11] According to the respective definitions in sources of the Consciousness-Only-School,[12] both kinds of phenomena cannot be apprehended by sense organs. They are therefore not considered as perceptual objects (i.e. objects produced by "sensorial consciousnesses"), but as objects produced by the activity of the "mental consciousness" (*yi shi* 意識, Skt. *manovijñāna*). The function of this consciousness, which is the sixth within the Consciousness-Only classification of the eight types of consciousness (*ba shi* 八識), is to analyze and to form conceptions out of the data obtained in the activities of the five sense-consciousnesses. Interestingly, the designations "phenomena of extreme distance" and "phenomena of extreme reduction" themselves convey an idea of concept formation akin to the perspective of Consciousness-Only theory: The notions about matter that cannot be sensed are formed by analogy with notions about perceivable material objects, as if they were too remote or too small to be directly apprehended by the senses.[13] As it seems, Li Rihua undertook a sophisticated

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10 One of the schools of Chinese Buddhism based on the interpretations and translations of the Indian *Yogācāra* tradition by Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664) and his disciples. For information see for example Lusthaus 2004: 1, 283–284; Lee 2015.

11 See *Ciyi* ed. 1988: 5,478 and 5,479. URL: https://www.fgs.org.tw/fgs_book/fgs_drser.aspx [last accessed on June 17, 2020]. As noted here, an explanation of these phenomena appears i.a. in *j*.1 of the *Abhidharma-samuccaya* (*Dasheng Apidamo za ji lun* 大乘阿毘達磨雜集論) by Asanga (300–370 AD), translated by Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664), see T 1606: 0696b27.

12 Ciyi ed. 1988: 5,478, 5,479.

13 Cf. some examples from current metaphor theories which point to similar mechanisms in the construction of our notions about electricity (e.g. as a "flow", cf. Lakoff 1987) or about molecules: "What makes insensible things intelligibly describable is analogy, notably the special form of analogy known as extrapolation. Thus consider molecules, which are described as smaller than anything seen. This term 'smaller' is initially meaningful to us through some manner of association with such observable contrasts as that of a bee to a bird, a Gnat to a bee, or a mote of dust to a Gnat. The extrapolation that leads to talk of wholly invisible particles, microbes for example, can be represented as an analogy of relation: microbes are supposed to compare in size to the motes of dust as these do to the bees. [...] Once we have imagined molecules with the help thus of size

adaptation of the Buddhist concepts to compositional theory: In this appropriation the phenomena of distance and reduction refer to such elements, which in the spatial order of the picture *do* appear at distant grounds and are executed in a sketchy manner.

Thus Li's reference to Consciousness-Only concepts reveals that for him the contents of the third picture-level is constituted by the functions of consciousness: It is a mental projection (imagination) of a content not given, rather than a rendering or representation of a given content. This approach also entails a change of perspective regarding the entire theory of three levels: The theory can (or even should) *not* be understood as an instruction about how to structure a picture in referential correspondence to some external world, which is supposed to be depicted. Rather, the ordering of different spatial registers specified in the theory reflects the way how the world-image unfolds in a process of mental experience. It traces how the sensorial and cognitive horizon takes form and progressively expands from body-centeredness through objectified visuality into the realm of mental conceptualization, an expansion, which in all of its phases remains *within* the confines of the consciousness.

There can be no doubt that Li Rihua was familiar with the expression "the three realms are only mind" (*san jie wei xin* 三界唯心).[14] While more reading of his writings is needed in order to assess the scope and trace the exact instances of the impact of Buddhist thinking on his theory of art, we tentatively suggest that his theory of three levels was inspired, possibly even based on the model of *tridhātu* (*san jie* 三界 "three realms"). In the context of the Consciousness-Only school, this model[15] constitutes an epistemological outline of the structure of psychosophic reality, the "three existential horizons" in which "the human condition

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analogies, we bring other analogies to bear. Thus, applying dynamical terms first learned in connection with visible things, we represent molecules as moving, bumping, bouncing. Such is analogy's power to make sense of the insensible." (Quine 1960: 13).

14 The expression "The three realms are illusion; they are only produced by the mind" (*san jie xu wang, dan shi xin zuo* 三界虛妄。但是心作) appears in the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (Dafangguang Fohuayan jing 大方廣佛華嚴經, T 279: 10.558c10) (translation, slightly modified, adopted from Hamar (2014: 176). See other references and the account of the origins of the expression in Hammerstrom 2010: 75–81. Hammerstrom notes that apart from the occurrence in the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*, "the expression appears another 282 times in the Taishō, in a broad range of texts, but primarily in texts important for Consciousness-Only thought" (p. 76, note 15).

15 For a comprehensive treatment of the model in the framework of Conscioussness-Only theory and descriptions of the respective realms see Lusthaus (2006: 83–109), and references in ibid.: 102 note 2. Lusthaus stresses that these realms should not be considered as ontological but rather as epistemological levels according to Consciousness-Only theory.

locates itself".[16] If we adopt this understanding to the interpretation of the three levels theory, the compositional structure of painting may well be considered as an "en-pictured" correlate of this underlying epistemological construction.

A similar case in point involving an interpretation of painting practices as an analogon to the creation of the phenomenological world in cognition seems to be the well-known theory of "one line" (*yi hua* 一畫) from the treatise *Records of Remarks on Painting by Monk Bitter Gourd*[17] (*Kugua heshang hua yulu* 苦瓜和尚畫語錄, 1632) by Shitao 石濤 (1642–1707).[18]According to Shitao's version of cosmogenesis, the topic of the first chapter of the treatise, after the primordial undifferentiated state had fallen apart, certain "orders" (*fa* 法) came about:

> In primordial antiquity, there were no orders; primordial simplicity had not yet disintegrated. Once primordial simplicity had disintegrated, orders were established.
> 太古無法, 太樸不散
> 太僕一散, 而法立矣。[19]

As Shitao speaks about the originally undifferentiated state of the cosmos, his allusion to the *Daodejing* 道德經 is immediately recognizable:

> [When] primordial simplicity disintegrates, then it is made into implements.
> 樸散則為器。[20]

In analogy to the function of implements in chapter 28 of the *Daodejing*, orders in Shitao's text feature as means to maintain the current – and disintegrated – state of the world.

The implement for establishing orders is the "one line". The line is at the same time the origin of everything, which is given, has certain properties (*you* 有), and acts as the root of all "images" (*xiang* 象). In Shitao's words:

> On what basis were orders established? They were established on the basis of the *one line*. What is referred as 'one line' is the origin of all things, the root of the totality of images.

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16 Adopted from Lusthaus (2006: 100).

17 Translation of the title by Johathan Hay (2001: 377).

18 Shitao's original name was Zhu Ruoji 朱若极, he belonged to the imperial family of the Ming-Dynasty; a painter, calligrapher, Buddhist monk, converted to Daoism later in his life. See the comprehensive study of his life and work by Johathan Hay (2001).

19 Shitao, *Records*, 1. The translation, slightly modified, is adopted from Hay (2001: 276).

20 *Daodejing*, 28. Translation of the second part of the line adopted from Waley 1999: 57, although the translation 'implementation' for *qi* 器 is somewhat anachronistic for the time the *Daodejing* was written. Cf. translation by D.C. Lau: "When the uncarved block shatters it becomes vessels." (http://web.archive.org/web/20100417151035/http://home.pages.at/onkellotus/TTK/English_Lau_TTK.html [last accessed on 17 June, 2020]).

法於何立？立於一畫。
一畫者眾有之本，萬象之根。[21]

In the majority of English and German translations of Shitao's text, *hua* in the expression "one line" is rendered as 'brushstroke' ('Pinselstrich') or just 'stroke'.[22] However, it seems unlikely that Shitao would have narrowed down the scope of the initial cosmological topic to the subject matter of painting proper that fast.

If we look at the usages of *hua* during the lifetime of Shitao, we find that the meaning 'stroke of the brush' is rather uncommon.[23] In the art theoretical texts of the period, *hua* seems to have been used either generically for 'painted image' or 'painting' as a genre, or as a verb 'to paint, to draw'. The character dictionary of the *Kangxi*-era (*Kangxi zidian* 康熙字典), first published in 1716 and roughly contemporary to Shitao's text, gives the following meanings of *hua*:

(1) A line in tri- or hexagrams of the *Book of Changes* (*gua hua ye* 卦畫也).[24]
(2) Dividing (line), division, boundary, limit (*fen hua ye, jie xian ye* 分畫也, 界限也) and a synonym of *hua* 劃, that is 'to divide, to demarcate (zones)' and, by extension, 'to plan, to arrange, to manage'.[25]

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21 Shitao, *Records*: 1. Translation, slightly modified, is adopted from Hay (2001: 276).

22 Cf. Nürnberger (2009), Pohl (2007: 372), Hay (2001: 272) (while translating *yi hua* (一畫) as "One-Stroke" Hay comments: "literally, 'Oneness Painting'"), Coleman (1978).

23 In the art-theoretical texts of the period one finds such designations as (*yi*) *bi* (一)筆 or *cun* 皴 for a 'brushstroke' (in the narrower sense of a line put by the brush onto paper/silk) instead. Moreover, there are various names for different types of strokes, such as *pima cun* 披麻皴 ('combed-hemp-fibers-[like] strokes'), etc. A list with examples of the types of strokes can be found in the contemporary painting manual *Jieziyuan huazhuan* 芥子園畫傳) (1678) [Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting] (for the translation of the title and a characterization of the work see Sze 1956).

24 *Kangxi zidian*: 763.

25 ibid. For this second meaning the *Kangxi zidian* quotes a passage from "Admonitions" (*zhen* 箴) listed in the *Zuozhuan* (Duke Xiang fourth year, 2:5):

(左傳·襄公四年) 芒芒禹跡畫為九州 (注畫分也)

In [the section] of the *Zuozhuan* on the fourth year of Duke Xiang [it is said]: By the traces of [emperor] Yu in the vast expanse the Nine Regions [of China] were demarcated. (Comment: '*hua*' means 'to divide/to separate').

The example perfectly illustrates the conjunction between the act of drawing territorial boundaries and the ordering or controlling the country.

The relations between the meanings 'draw; painting' and 'divide', etc. are also obliquely reflected in the etymology of the characters 畫 and 劃 (p.c. Wolfgang Behr): The character 畫 has two Middle Chinese readings: **hweaH* (< Old Chinese * C-g$^{w\varsigma}$rek-s) and **hweak* (< OC * g$^{w\varsigma}$rek). The second reading is used for the verb 'to mark' → 'draw', 'paint' and is completely homophonic with 劃. Probably the classifier *dao* 刀 'knife' has been added to mark the difference between 'mark', 'split off' on the one hand and 'draw', 'paint' (without 刀) on the other, which was in its turn created by metaphorical extension of 'mark'. The first reading is exopassive (Schüssler 2007: 283) – i.e. 'to be painted', which is then used as a nominal 'what is painted' → 'picture'.

In view of the above connotations of *hua* we can derive a broader meaning of Shitao's concept of "one line" (*yi hua*) which seems more appropriate to the overall context of the first chapter of his treatise. It is highly plausible to assume that Shitao intended a metaphorically expanded interpretation of the "line" as a fundamental constituent of our human world that comes into existence via the division and differentiation of an original unity into a manageable order of handy objects and images.

The role of "dividing" as the fundamental means of cognizing and rendering the world intelligible and manageable is also attested in the following passage from the *Tangles of the School of [Dharma]-Characteristics* (*Xiangzong luosuo* 相宗絡索) by Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619–1619):[26]

> The appearances manifested by consciousness result from dividing the area [that appears] in front [of it] into regions known by it. The area is established on the inside; constraints of cognition[27] are circumscribed on the outside. The first five [consciousnesses] take the projected areas as their constraint. The sixth [consciousness] takes what is reached by counting and measuring as its constraint. The seventh [consciousness] takes that what it clings to as its constraint.
> 識所顯著之相因區劃前境為其所知之域也。境立於內, 量規於外。前五以所照之境為量, 第六以計度所及為量, 第七以所執為量。[28]

One of the earliest treatises on the history of painting, the *Lidai minghua ji* 歷代名畫記 [Notes on famous paintings throughout history] by Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠 (*fl.* 841) paraphrases the definition of *hua* from the *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (2nd century A.D.). While the gloss in the *Shuowen* reads: 畫, 界也, 象田四界; 聿, 所以畫之。("To paint is to make boundaries. [The graph] is an image of the four boundaries of a field; a brush is what one paints with", translation adapted from Goldin (2018: 501, note 21), Zhang omits the character *yu* 聿 (brush) in his paraphrase, which results in: 畫, 畛也, 象田畛畔, 所以畫也 ("'*Hua*' means 'margin', it is like a margin between fields, i.e. that by which one demarcates" (*Lidai minghua ji*, 1.2a). Whereas Goldin concludes that "Without *yu* 聿 (brush), Zhang's *suoyi hua* 所以畫 makes no sense" (*ibid.*), we can suggest that maybe the omission of *yu* 聿 "makes sense" and was perhaps even a deliberate change of the phrase from the *Shuowen* in order to pinpoint the meaning of drawing boundaries and demarcation as a procedure that enables pictorial representation: by drawing a border one draws (paints).

26 It seems to be significant that this prominent philosopher, whose thinking was typically radically anti-Buddhist, treated Buddhist theories of consciousness at length. This suggests his deep interest in the questions of how human consciousness functions in generating ideas about the world and the self. He also turned to some concepts from the Buddhist epistemology (such as *xianliang* 現量, Skt. *pratyakṣa-pramāṇa* 'perceptual presence') in his theory of poetry and critique (see Xiao 2012).

27 A translation for *liang* 量 (literally 'measure'), Skt. *pramāṇa*.

28 Wang Fuzhi, *Xiangzong*, 13: 536.

If we assume that Shitao's "one line" refers to the parsing of the world into cognizable "pieces" – individual phenomena, as its fundamental function in establishing the order of our human world – we better understand the relation of the concept of "one line" to the "orders" *fa*. As we saw, these orders maintain and regulate the existence of the current disintegrated state of the world, according to Shitao.

Following this interpretation, we can also grasp the Buddhist underpinnings of Shitao's treatment of the concept of *fa* in the very sense the Chinese Buddhists came to use this term as a translation of Sanskrit *dharma*. Against this background, *fa*-orders are construed as factors or constituents of the existence not *as it is* (by itself), but rather *as it is formed* in relation to the cognizing and acting subject.[29] This use of the term *fa* is well attested in other theories of art during this period and thus not at all improbable in the case of Shitao.[30]

Shitao's emphasis of the role of the Self (*wo* 我) in establishing orders of "one line" is also consistent with a perspective which acknowledges the role of subjective agency in the creation of the world:

> The orders of the "one line" are thus established from the Self.
> 所以一畫之法乃自我立。[31]

Thus, the general function of the line in establishing the human reality by dividing is perfectly congenial with a specific function of single lines in shaping a pictorial image.[32] This, it seems, was the central idea of Shitao. If so, the analogy of the creation of an image in painting with the establishment of the phenomenal world through subjective activity can be considered as the very foundation of the "one line" theory.

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29 See for example Buswell et al. (eds.) 2013: 242. Cf. also the explanation of *fa* in Kantor (2016: 126), Footnote 1: "The term 'dharma' (in Chinese: *fa* 法) is derived from Sanskrit root 'dhṛ-', which means 'to adhere', 'hold', etc. 'Dharma' is a noun, and its Chinese translation, '*fa*', means 'law', 'example', and 'imitation'. Chinese Buddhist texts use this term in different ways. Often, it conveys the sense of 'thing' or 'entity', but also appears in compound expressions, such as 'Buddha-dharma' (law of the Buddha's teaching) [...]. All this expresses that the way things appear to us is dependent on, or determined by, our behavioral or habitual relationships to those things. The existence of an intrinsic nature does not inform about the identity of a particular thing. What constitutes a thing is rooted in our habitual tendencies, according to Mahāyāna Buddhism. Therefore, '*dharma*' or '*fa*' is often used as a synonym for the Buddhist sense of 'thing'."

30 Cf. for example my interpretation of *fa* in Ye Xie's 葉燮 (1627–1703) theory of poetry, see Lukicheva, forthcoming.

31 Shitao, *Records*: 1. The translation, slightly modified, is adopted from Hay (2001: 276).

32 Shitao turns to the role of the "one line" in painting specifically in chapter 9 of his treatise, the "Methods of the *cun*-brushstrokes" (*Cun fa zhang* 皴法章):

一畫落紙, 眾畫隨之。

As one line descends onto paper, it is followed by multiple lines. (Shitao, *Records*, 9).

2 Envisioning the world as it is

Although many Chinese art theorists have stressed that observing the natural environment was indispensable for a painter's practice, a lot of accounts also point to the fact that the process of creating a landscape picture did not involve a direct visual interaction with the scenery. It was the imagination and the impressions of landscapes seen in the past rather than current visual experience that contributed to the creation of a landscape image. The following statement indicates the principal role of internal factors in the formation of a pictorial composition:

> First of all, accomplish the arrangement of mental orders in the breast.[33]
> 胸中先成意法布置。

If creation and representation were considered as essentially bound to the operations of the mind, did vision as a *direct* perceptual experience play any role in the creation process as conceived by the literati artists of the 17th century? Was an immediate access to the world *per se* supposed to be opened by vision and to be represented in the picture?

We attempt to answer these questions by looking at an example from the essay *Joys of Chan* (*Chanyue* 禪悅) by a prominent scholar-official, leading painter, calligrapher and art theorist of the Late Ming period, Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555–1636). In one passage of the essay, Dong discusses sensory perception (vision and hearing) in its relation to cognitive acts and mental states in the following way:[34]

> The *Zhongyong* exhorts to be apprehensive towards that which cannot be seen, and to be cautious towards that which cannot be heard. Once exhorted to be apprehended, [the phenomena] belong to what can be seen and heard. But what cannot be seen or heard, is out of reach of the exhortation to be apprehended. [Such exhortation] is similar to the saying: "watch *qi*-ethereal images when they have not yet appeared". But since they have not yet appeared, is there anything to be seen?
> In the winter of 1588, together with Tang Yuanhui, Yuan Boxiu, Qu Dongguan, Wu Guanwo, Wu Benru, Xiao Xuanpu,[35] I visited Chan master Hanshan[36] in the *Longhua* monastery for a

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33 Fang Xun, *Shanjing*: 436.

34 For information on the person and the work, see Chan et al. (eds.) 2008; Ho and Smith (eds.) 1992, etc.

35 Under their respective courtesy names (*zi* 字) or pseudonyms (*hao* 號) the following scholars are listed here: Yuan Zongdao 袁 宗 道 (1560–1600), Qu Ruji 瞿汝稷 (1548–1610), Wu Yingbin 吳應賓 (1564–1635), Wu Yongxian 吳用 先 (fl. 1592), Xiao Yunju 蕭雲舉 (1554–1627) – all prominent literati of the time.

36 Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清 (1546–1623), one of the most important Buddhist thinkers of the late Ming period, one of the so called "Four prominent monks of the *wanli*-era" (1572–1620) (萬曆四高僧), along with Daguan Zhenke 達觀真可 (1543–1603), *alias* Zibo Zhenke 紫栢真可, Yuqi Zhuhong

night talk. When I conveyed this issue, Qu made the following statement: "[It is like] fishing at a place which is not appropriate for fishing." I did not agree with this statement and said: "It is strictly prohibited to fish for [anything] at the places that are not appropriate for it." I went on in my argument referring to the verse: "There is no bell tone in the drum, there is no drum sound in a bell. The bell's and the drum's [tones] do not intermingle, no utterance does refer to the previous or the following one." Qu said: "There is no obstruction." I again could not agree with his saying and replied: "[There should be] no borrowing."

中庸戒懼乎其所不睹恐懼乎其所不聞。既戒懼矣, 即屬睹聞。既不睹聞矣, 戒懼之所不到。僧云觀未發氣象 既未發矣何容觀也。
余於戊子冬與唐元徽、袁伯修 、瞿洞觀、 吳觀我、 吳本如、蕭玄圃 同會於龍華寺憨山禪師夜談。余徵此義, 瞿著語云: 沒撈摸處撈摸。余不肯其語曰: 沒撈摸處切忌撈摸。又徵鼓中無鐘聲, 鐘中無鼓響, 鐘鼓不交叅, 句句無前後。瞿曰: 不礙。余亦不肯其語曰: 不借。[37]

In the beginning of this account, Dong Qichang refers to a famous statement from the *Zhongyong* 中庸 [Doctrine of the Mean],[38] which urges an attentive (even fearful) approach towards phenomena not perceived by the senses.[39] Dong's critique of the moral dictum of the *Zhongyong* entails, as it seems, an argument from what we could call a theory of perception: As Dong calls for a strict correspondence of mental acts to the related sensory experience, he in fact argues for

雲棲株宏 (1535–1615) *alias* Lianchi Zhuhong 蓮池袾宏, and Ouyi Zhixu 藕益智旭 (1599–1655). See the comprehensive study of life and work of Hanshan by Sung-peng Hsu 1978.

37 Dong Qichang, *Chanyue*: 1,797–1,798.

38 One of the Four Books of the Confucian canon, for a detailed description and translation see Plaks (2003). Plaks translates the title as *On the Practice of the Mean;* for a justification of this translation see pp. 23–24.

39 Dong refers to the following passage from the *Zhongyong*: "What we take to be 'the Way' does not admit of the slightest degree of separation therefrom, even from an instant. For that which does admit of such separation is thereby disqualified from being the true Way. Given this understanding, the man of noble character exercises utmost restraint and vigilance towards that which is inaccessible to his own vision, and he regards with fear and trembling that which is beyond the reach of his own hearing. For, ultimately, nothing is more visible than what appears to be hidden, and nothing is more manifest than matters of imperceptible subtlety. For this reason, the man of noble character pays great heed to the core of his own individuality." (道者也, 不可須臾離也; 可離,非道也。是故, 君子戒慎乎其所不睹, 恐懼乎其所不聞。莫 見乎隱, 莫顯乎微, 故君子慎其獨也。) (*Zhongyong* 1, translation by Plaks 2003: 25). Dong Qichang's understanding is of course not the only possible interpretation of this statement (p.c. Rafael Suter): Since Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200), for instance, this exhortation by the *Mean* has been referred to as being about one's psychophysical disposition before the arisal of concrete feelings (*wei fa* 未發). For Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529) and some of his disciples (e.g. Wang Ji 王畿 (1498–1583), however, this exhortation of Zhu Xi was nonsense, because they doubted that perceptiveness could be trained if there was nothing perceived.

discriminating between what perceptual experience – strictly speaking – is, that is, what is actually perceived (seen or heard) on the one hand, and cognitive procedures, more or less freely associated with the initial sensorial act, on the other.

Dong is particularly rigorous in two respects. With respect to sensory perception he stresses the limits to which it can be applied, namely only to the phenomena that are actually given to perception. And with respect to cognitive actions or states (such as being apprehensive and cautious), he delimits the scope of their relevance strictly to phenomena which are accessible to perception. According to Dong, both sensory perception and the cognitive activity should be closely tied to concrete sense data and may not be performed independently of the moment of sensory access.

Dong's position seems to agree with the position that Hanshan Deqing, the host of the night meeting, calls for in his own commentary on the same Confucian text. Hanshan also insists on making oneself attentive to what is actually being seen or heard in everyday practice, precisely at the moment of seeing or hearing:[40]

> One should concentrate efforts on the quotidian functioning of seeing forms/colors and hearing sounds. It must be strictly the moments when one is seeing forms/colors and hearing sounds.
> 就在日用見色聞聲處著力。切要正當見色聞聲時。[41]

Hanshan agrees with the dictum of the *Zhongyong* that one should be apprehensive and cautious with respect to imperceptible phenomena. He does so, precisely because otherwise – as Hanshan argues in the course of his commentary – one would run the risk of taking what is the result of habitualization as actual perception. In a way, Hanshan thus alerts to "mind the gap" between perception *per se* and the habitualized patterns of thought and action:

> From the first indications of what is [given] to us as sounds and forms/colors, we immediately get into the routinization of feelings and habits.
> 由吾人於聲色頭一向情習太熟。[42]

If we now turn back to Dong's account of the discussion at night, not only can we suggest the similarity of his views to those of Hanshan; we can also identify a subtle doctrinal difference of the respective approaches to cognition in the polemics between Dong and Qu Ruji.

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40 Similar views are also attested in the writings of some of the pupils of Wang Yangming (e.g. Wang Ji and his followers) (p.c. Rafael Suter).

41 Hanshan Deqing, *Zhongyong*: 5b–6a. For analysis of Hanshan's commentary and its translation into French, see Zhuang (2015: 454–465).

42 Hanshan Deqing, *Zhongyong*: 5b–6a.

In his response to Dong's statement that there is nothing to look at or to hear in phenomena which have not yet appeared, Qu Ruji replies with a metaphor of fishing: [looking at and listening to phenomena that have not yet appeared is like] "fishing at a 'place of no-fishing'" (*wu lao mo chu* 無撈摸處). This somewhat puzzling expression appears in the 10th and 31st fascicles (*juan*) of the *Records of a Finger Pointing to the Moon* (*Zhiyue lu* 指月錄),[43] the collection of Chan stories and sayings, which Qu Ruji compiled and published.[44] The corresponding passage in fascicle 10 reads:

> In general, one clings to the sense-objects (*jing*); a Man of the Dao clings to [his own] heart-mind. [If one] forgets both the heart-mind and the sense-objects, then this is the "true *dharma*". [While] forgetting the sense-objects is rather easy, forgetting the heart-mind is extremely difficult. People do not dare to forget the heart-mind for they fear to fall into emptiness, i.e. into the "place of no-fishing". They do not know that emptiness is basically non-[existing] emptiness. [There is] only the one true *dharma*-world (Skt. *dharmadhātu*)!
> 凡夫取境。道人取心。心境雙亡。乃是真法。忘境猶易。忘心至難。人不敢忘心。恐落空無撈摸處。不知空本無空。唯一真法界耳。[45]

As it appears here, the expression "place of no-fishing" refers to the emptiness, which one fears to get into, once one abandons the subjective sphere of the heart-mind. This fear, according to the quote, arises due to one's ignorance of the fact that there is essentially no emptiness, but only true reality.

We can therefore reconstruct Qu Riji's argument in the discussion with Dong Qichang as follows: Since what appears as emptiness (that is, the "place of no-fishing") is a false vision from the perspective of a deluded mind, it should be allowed to "fish" even at the "place of no-fishing", that is to gain knowledge about reality even at the places of alleged emptiness. In other words, Qu seems to hold that, since everything (what one sees or hears) refers to the absolute reality, one should be able to refer to it even if there is nothing one can base one's perception on. As Qu's expression "does not obstruct" (*bu ai* 不礙) suggests, he possibly elaborates his argument proceeding from the notion of the *Huayan*-school (華嚴宗)

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43 The translation of the title taken from Jiang Wu (2008: 60). "Finger pointing the moon" is a well-known metaphor in Chan Buddhism that describes the relationship between the teaching of a doctrine ("finger pointing") and the meaning the teaching refers to ("moon"). Corresponding passages can be found in the Ch. 2 of the *Śūraṃgama-sūtra (Dafo dingshou Lengyan jing* 大佛頂首楞嚴經, T 945) and in the Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch – the "Platform-sūtra" (*Liu zu tan jing* 六祖壇經, T 2008).

44 Although the collection had not yet been published by the time the discussion took place, it did exist in the form of notes: According to the preface to *Zhiyue lu*, Qu began taking notes on his readings of Chan literature in 1575; for this and further information on *Zhiyue lu* see Wu 2008: 60–61, 198.

45 Qu Ruji, *Zhiyue lu*: 10.

of an unimpeded penetration of all phenomena (*shi shi wu ai* 事事無礙) and the interaction of the noumenal (*li fa jie* 理法界) and phenomenal (*shi fa jie* 事法界) realms (*li shi wu ai* 理事無礙).

In contrast to this, Dong Qichang's point, as observed earlier, is to say that the correspondence between perception and the mental state should be strictly maintained, that is the referents of the mental procedures should lie strictly within the boundaries of the perceptual domain, and should not be extended over to the unperceivable. Dong further introduces the following examples into the discussion: "There is no bell tone in the drum, there is no drum sound in a bell. The bell's and the drum's [tones] do not intermingle, no utterance does refer to the previous or the following one."[46] In connection with this saying, his concluding statement "[there should be] no borrowing" (*bu jie* 不借) possibly refers to the following idea: Since an actually perceived phenomenon is *this* and nothing else and since it is only available at the moment it is there, it does not presuppose any contextual or associative connections to other phenomena. Accordingly, one must not extrapolate ("borrow") meanings from one phenomenon to another. Context-based linking of meanings (for example, of elements of a sentence) and establishing connections between purportedly related phenomena, e.g. between such phenomena, which appear temporally and spatially close to one another, or phenomena that belong to one class (e.g. tones of the drum and the bell) – all of these practices are illusionary.

Dong's emphasis on the immediate perception points to the ontological assumptions of moment-to-moment existence, i.e. to a view of reality where only "a moment of conscious sense-perception is real",[47] which is shared by some Buddhist teachings. At the same time this stance seems to imply a rather rigorous

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46 The saying appears in the fascicle 2 of the *Extensive Records by the Chan Master Xuansha* (835–908) (*Xuansha shi chanshi guanglu* 玄沙師備禪師廣錄), T. 1445: 73.15a08.

47 Cf. Lusthaus, referring to the position of the Consciounsness-Only school, in particular the one expressed in the *Discourse on the Perfection of Consciousness-only* (*Cheng weishi lun* 成唯識論); see http://www.acmuller.net/yogacara/thinkers/xuanzang-bio.html [last accessed on June 17, 2020]. Cf. the whole quotation: "Real existents, which *Cheng weishi lun* defines as momentary, produced by causes and conditions, and producing an observable effect. Thus something permanent and non-observable, such as God or Suchness, is not real, while a moment of conscious sense-perception is real. All three are further defined as 'conventionally true' (*saṃvṛti-sat*). What is 'ultimately true' (*paramārtha-sat*) is the flux of mutually dependent, momentary conditions (*paratantra*). ibid."

In his *Chanyue*, Dong Qichang often refers to the tradition of Conscious-Only, especially to Xuanzang. Obviously, Xuanzang represented one of the greatest Buddhist authorities for him. The *Chanyue* also contains a number of other accounts which record the view of the world as a "flux of mutually dependent, momentary conditions". Dong also often furnishes these accounts with the concepts and the quotations from the Huayan tradition (see for instance *Chanyue:* 1828–1830).

repudiation not only of artistic activity, but also of practices of text and image production in general. Particularly the phrase "no utterance refers to the previous and the following one" indicates the insight that constructions of contextually and compositionally coherent relations in a text (or in an image) are always fictional and therefore epistemologically and ontologically irrelevant!

As indicated earlier, the view of artistic practice as coping with mental images and not asserting an access to the world *as it is* was widely shared by artists and theorists of the period under scrutiny. But could the view of the world as momentary existence cast another perspective on artistic practice, namely a practice which is able to capture a single moment of perception?

A number of landscape images – in particularly those by Dong Qichang – indeed seem to capture the moment of here and now as if suspended in a "stop frame". For such pictures, we can possibly apply the concept of momentary existence as a suitable explanatory framework. If we take Dong Qichang's landscape cycle *Eight Views of the Autumn Mood* (*Qiu xing ba jing* 秋興八景) as an example,[48] we find the combination of expression of the uniqueness of the moment in autumn captured in each leaf with the alteration of these moments in the course of the journey particularly appealing. Each leaf presents a unique focus on the very instance of the perception-impression of an autumn scene at a particular time-space point of the journey. Each leaf has an individual compositional scheme and rhythmic pattern, and contains visual and poetic cues prone to unfold a singular reality with its past, presence and future, and multiple associative layers. Still, each leaf – the instant containing reality – will be dissolved by the next one to constitute the ever cycling closure of all-encompassing momentariness as a whole. Ultimately, the last leaf presents us with a view on human and natural affairs as now and eternally present:

> There's only a stone bridge.
> And the water under the bridge
> runs eastward as ever.
> 只有石橋
> 橋下水依舊東流。[49]

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48 In the collection of Shanghai museum. This cycle was produced by Dong during a journey on a boat in the area of Suzhou in the eighth and ninth months of 1620. The series of 8 album leaves is a pictorial counterpart to the poetic cycle of Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770) *Eight Poems of the Autumn Mood* (*Qiu xing ba shou* 秋興八首), to which Dong points out on the last leaf of his landscape cycle. Dong Qichang's eight views, however, are not illustrations of the poems of Du Fu. Cf. my analysis in Lukicheva, forthcoming.

49 This is a line from the poem by Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫 (1254–1322), inscribed on the 8th leaf of the series.

On the conceptual level, the view of the world as momentarily existent connects with the concept of *yi nian* 一念. In one of the passages in the *Chanyue*, Dong provides a whole range of meanings of this concept[50] as elaborated in the Huayan, Tiantai and Chan schools:

> The *Huayan-sūtra* says:[51] "In one thought (*yi nian*) contemplate countless *kalpas*.[52] There is no going, no coming and no passing away. In this way, grasp the affairs of the three periods:[53] surpass all the skillful means and attain the ten powers".[54] Li Changzhe[55] explains this as follows: "The ten periods,[56] the past and the present, the beginning and the end are inseparable from present thought (*dang nian*)." This 'present thought' is identical to what Yongjia[57] refers to as 'one thought', i.e. the 'self-nature' of the numinous awareness.[58] What cannot be equated to the numerous conditions is called 'one thought' and there is only this one self-corresponding thought: the preceding and the following breaks off.
> 華嚴經云: 一念普觀無量刼, 無去無來亦無往, 如是了達三世事。超諸方便成十力。 李長者釋之曰: 十世古今始終不離當念。當念即永嘉所云一念者, 靈知之自性也。不與衆緣作對名爲一念, 相應惟此一念, 前後際斷。[59]

In this account, Dong thoroughly combines the vision of *yi nian* as a momentary insight which pervades the wholeness of the universe and encompasses all of its spatio-temporal dimensions, as elaborated in the *Huayan-sūtra*, with the notion of *yi nian* as being, at the same time, the moment of introspection, that is "an encounter" with the self-nature inherently identical with the absolute. Thus, the moment of *yi nian* is described as the presence in utmost reality.

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50 To this range of meanings cf. the explication in *Foxue da cidian* 2004–2020 URL: https://foxue.51240.com/yinian__foxued/ [last accessed on June 17, 2020].

51 T 279:17. 65c20.

52 The longest unit of time in the Hinduist and Buddhist cosmologies.

53 That is past, present, and future, cf. *Foxue da cidian*. https://foxue.51240.com/sanshi__foxued/. In *Huayan-sūtra* all these time-periods are described as contained in this single thought: 三世唯是一念 (T 279: 37.196a18).

54 That is spiritual faculties and wisdoms of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas, cf. *Foxue da cidian* 2004–2020 URL: https://foxue.51240.com/shili__foxued/ [last accessed on 17 June, 2020].

55 That is Li Tongxuan 李通玄 (c. 635–c. 730), known for his commentary and research on the *Huayan-sūtra*.

56 In the *Huayan-sūtra* there is a differentiation of each of the "three periods" into further three. These nine periods and the one encompassing them give ten. Cf. T 45 n1869_002: 528b16.

57 I.e. Yongjia Xuanjue dashi 永嘉玄覺大師 (665–712), a Chan monk and an expert on Tiantai practices of calming and contemplation. For further details see Buswell and Lopez (eds.) 2013: 179.

58 "Numinous awareness" in the context of the Chan School denotes the fundamental identity of knowing/experiencing the sensory realm and the capacity to attain enlightenment, that is, inherent enlightenment. Dong's quote is taken from the *Yongjia ji* (永嘉集, T 2013: 389b21). The concept of numinous awareness was especially elaborated by Chan and Huayan adept Guifeng Zongmi (圭峰宗密, 780–841). For these and further details see Buswell and Lopez (eds.) 2013: 335.

59 Dong Qichang, *Chanyue*: 1,794–1,795.

Of his own experience of *yi nian* in the fall of 1589, when on the way back home from Nanjing, Dong writes:

> [...] In the fall of that year, on the return from Jinling,[60] suddenly the realm of the three worlds manifested itself in one thought.[61] Consciousness didn't move. It was only after some two and a half days that I realized that what the *Great Teaching* [refers to] by saying: "The heart-mind does not abide in this. One looks and does not see, one listens and does not hear" is exactly the realm of enlightenment. There can be no misunderstanding about it.
> [...] 其年秋自金陵下第歸, 忽現一念三世境界。意識不行。凡兩日半而後乃知大學所云心不在焉。視而不見, 聽而不聞。正是悟境, 不可作迷解。[62]

Where "the heart-mind does *not* abide" is described in a passage from the *Great Learning*,[63] which precedes the one cited by Dong: "one's personal relations are governed by animosity and resentment"; "one is possessed by fear and trepidation"; "one's consciousness is occupied by feelings of fondness and delight"; "one is obsessed with anxiety and grief." (身有所忿懥; 有所恐懼 [...]; 有所好樂 [...]; 有所憂患 [...]).[64] In sharp contradistinction to the traditional Neo-Confucian interpretation of the passage from the *Great Learning*, according to which these states arise due to the absentmindedness (*xin bu zai yan* 心不在焉) and non-apprehensiveness (*shi er bu jian, ting er bu wen* 視而不見, 聽而不聞), Dong understands the phrase "the heart-mind does not abide" precisely in the sense of getting rid of such states. Thus, what is considered to be absentmindedness and non-apprehensiveness according to the conventional interpretation, is flagged as genuine enlightenment by Dong, a state where consciousness (*yishi*) ceases its activity, where ordinary vision and perception are abandoned, and total identification of the moment of perception with the universe (*xian yi nian san shi jing jie* 現一念三世境界) takes place. This is the state of omnivision, or rather: omnipresence, without fear, delusions and limitations.

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60 One of the old names of Nanjing.

61 Here, *nian* has an attributive verbal meaning. A more precise translation thus would be something like "the realm of the three worlds (*trailokyadhātavāḥ*) generated by unique act of *nian*". Note also Dong's use of *xian* 現 'be/become manifest, present', which he uses along with *nian*.

62 Dong, *Chanyue*: 1796–1797.

63 One of the Four Books in the Confucian Canon. For detailed information and translation see Plaks (2003).

64 *Daxue* 7, translation by Plaks (2003: 11–12).

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