

The Artistic Expression and Aesthetic Value of the Artistic Conception of Tang Poetry on Landscape

Ruijia Yi

School of Hubei University of Education, Wuhan China

Abstract: The landscape poetry of the Tang Dynasty holds a prominent place in the history of Chinese literature, especially the landscape poetry of the High Tang period, which represents the pinnacle of the development of Chinese landscape poetry. The inspiration and material for the creation of landscape poetry stem from natural landscapes. The texts of Tang Dynasty landscape poetry reflect the aesthetic consciousness of Tang poets. Through their contemplation of nature, poets discovered the inherent beauty of nature, experiencing the purification and cultivation of their souls during the aesthetic appreciation of nature, thus gaining a sense of beauty from these activities. One of the key reasons why Tang poetry became the peak of ancient Chinese poetic art is the epoch-making breakthroughs in the creation of artistic conception, particularly in landscape poetry, where the artistic conception presents new forms. This paper deeply analyzes the artistic expression and aesthetic value of the artistic conception in Tang poetry's landscape poetry, revealing its unique position in the history of Chinese literature and providing useful references for modern literary creation.

Keywords: Tang Dynasty landscape poetry, Artistic expression, Aesthetic value.

1. Cultural Connotations of Tang Dynasty Landscape Poetry

1.1. Interpretation of the Mountain Imagery

Ancient poets drew endless inspiration from mountains, which stemmed from the sacred perception of mountains held by early people. In classical texts such as the Book of Rites and Rites of Sacrifice, mountains were endowed with divine attributes, believed to bring clouds and rain and manifest miracles. Mountains were seen as natural deities and were worshipped for blessings and protection. The Spring and Autumn Annals (Chunqiu Fanlu) says: "Mountains and rivers are divine, bestowing treasures, nourishing tools, and supporting justice." The towering and majestic mountains made people look up in awe, giving rise to feelings of reverence and sanctification, becoming objects of worship [1-2]. In the landscape-themed poems of the Tang Dynasty, the mountain imagery often became a contrast to the mundane world, symbolizing freedom. For the poets, mountains were incompatible with the "mundane," and loving mountains meant loving freedom, despising fame and wealth, and yearning to distance oneself from worldly concerns [3].

1.2. Interpretation of the Water Imagery

For humans, water is the source of life, carrying profound cultural significance and philosophical reflections. In ancient Chinese thought, water was imbued with deep metaphors for the Dao and became a symbol of importance in Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. Confucianism states: "Water does not flow unless it fills the hollows; likewise, a gentleman's pursuit of the Dao must be complete to reach it." Daoism claims: "The highest good is like water. Water benefits all things without contending, residing in places that others disdain, thus it is close to the Dao." Buddhism says: "Just as water is pure, without defilement; profound, so is prajñāpāramitā." Thus, the ancients not only loved water but also used water imagery to express life philosophies and insights. Water, in contrast to land, refers broadly to rivers,

lakes, and seas. In Liu Yuxi's poem "On Parting by the Water" (Tan Shui Bie Bai Ershi'er), he wrote: "Water, so pure, so beautiful. From a ladle to a thousand miles, benefiting people and things, it flows and stops as time dictates. Like the Dao, pure and serene, so is friendship, simple yet true." This poem reflects the basic characteristics of water: clarity, vastness, benefiting others, and ceaseless flow. These traits align with the temperament of Tang poets, who valued moral integrity and pursued a broad, open-hearted state of mind.

2. Reasons for the Prosperity of Tang Dynasty Landscape Poetry

2.1. Ecological Factors

The climate during the Tang Dynasty was generally favorable for human habitation, and it directly influenced human life and the natural environment, particularly the distribution of forests and vegetation. The climate of the High Tang period was warm and humid, with ample rainfall, creating comfortable living conditions. The prosperous and flourishing Central Plains region, including Chang'an and its surroundings, enjoyed a temperate climate, with warm, dry springs, hot and rainy summers, cool and crisp autumns, and cold, dry winters. Compared to tropical regions with monotonous climates, the temperate zones of the Tang Dynasty had distinct seasonal changes, which led to diverse vegetation and fostered a rich and colorful natural landscape [4]. This climate not only shaped the temperament of the people but also influenced Tang poets' view of nature, enabling them to see the world with an open and egalitarian perspective and coexist harmoniously with nature. It provided the Tang landscape poets with the possibility of integrating aesthetic living with life itself.

2.2. Intellectual and Cultural Factors

The Tang Dynasty was a time of intellectual freedom and inclusivity, where Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism coexisted, forming a pluralistic cultural landscape (Table 1). These philosophies contained profound reflections on the

relationship between humans and nature, which deeply influenced the philosophical perspectives of Tang poets and shaped their creative ideas in landscape poetry. Confucian thought emphasized literature's social role, often subjugating it to political purposes, while its artistic independence was not as strongly emphasized. Daoist and Zen Buddhist thoughts, however, played a crucial role in shaping the aesthetic consciousness in Tang landscape poetry [5-6]. Daoism, with its reflections on the harmony between humans and nature, advocated for closeness to nature to experience the Dao, which was hidden within the natural landscape. Daoist masters often retreated from worldly affairs and embraced a life of seclusion in the mountains. These philosophical principles provided a rich foundation for the creation of landscape poetry and deeply influenced poets' thoughts and expressions regarding the human-nature relationship.

Table 1. The Influence of Intellectual and Cultural Factors on Tang Dynasty Landscape Poetry

Intellectual and Cultural Factors	The Influence on Tang Dynasty Landscape Poetry
Confucian Thought	Although Confucian thought limited the independence of literature, it provided landscape poetry with a certain social and moral educational significance.
Daoist Thought	It offered a rich philosophical foundation for Tang Dynasty landscape poetry, emphasizing the aesthetic awareness of the natural environment.
Daoist Thought on Seclusion	It encouraged Tang literati to pursue the aesthetic experience of natural landscapes, deepening their reflection on the relationship between humans and nature.

2.3. Political and Cultural Factors

Political factors largely determined the scope and manner of human activities in the natural environment. During periods of political stability and peace, society was harmonious, and people lived and worked in contentment, which was reflected not only in their daily attitudes but also in their efforts to protect the natural environment. Many poets of the High Tang period had their own retreats in the mountains, where they could afford the time, energy, and resources to maintain an eco-friendly, idyllic living environment [7]. This allowed them to appreciate nature from an aesthetic perspective, influencing their ecological aesthetic consciousness in landscape poetry. Nature provided abundant material for landscape poets, requiring a certain level of aesthetic ability to observe and appreciate the natural world. The "poetry exams" policy encouraged poets to enhance their ability to appreciate the beauty of nature, leading to an increase in both the quality and quantity of landscape poetry during the Tang Dynasty.

3. The Artistic Expression of the Artistic Conception in Tang Dynasty Landscape Poetry

3.1. Depiction of Natural Scenery

The Tang Dynasty, a golden age of cultural prosperity and artistic brilliance, produced landscape poetry of unique charm that vividly and delicately depicted the magnificence of natural scenery, becoming a treasure in ancient Chinese literature. In Wang Wei's *Autumn Evening in the Mountains* (Shanju Qiuming), we can deeply feel the poet's masterful technique and profound emotion. The line "After the new rain in the empty mountains" uses simple language to sketch a fresh and vibrant post-rain mountain scene. The air is clearer, and life seems more vivid. The next line, "The autumn air grows cold at dusk," pinpoints the season, with the crispness of an autumn evening adding to the tranquility and expansiveness. These images form a serene and harmonious picture, showcasing the tranquil and profound beauty of nature, and reflect the poet's high artistic accomplishment and aesthetic emotion.

3.2. Expression of Emotion

Tang Dynasty landscape poetry is a vital part of ancient Chinese literature, with its allure primarily lying in the detailed depiction of natural landscapes and the poets' ability to blend personal emotions with the natural scenery, achieving a fusion of emotion and scenery. For example, in Li Bai's *Farewell to Meng Haoran at Yellow Crane Tower* (Huanghelou Song Meng Haoran Zhi Guangling), Yellow Crane Tower, a famed building in southern China, has long been the subject of poets' admiration. Li Bai begins with, "My old friend bids farewell to the West at Yellow Crane Tower," indicating the farewell location while hinting at deep friendship. The next line, "Amid the blossoms of March, he heads to Yangzhou," uses "blossoms" to depict the prosperity and beauty of Yangzhou in March, subtly expressing the poet's well-wishes for his friend's future, while also hiding his own feelings of parting sorrow [8-9]. Thus, landscape poetry goes beyond mere descriptions of nature, becoming a reflection of the poet's inner emotions.

3.3. Expression of Philosophy

Tang landscape poetry not only vividly describes natural scenery and conveys rich emotions, but also embodies profound philosophical reflections. Wang Zhihuan's *Climbing White Crane Tower* (Deng Guanque Lou) is a classic example. In this poem, Wang uses the imagery of climbing high to express deep insights into life. The line "To see a thousand miles further, ascend one more floor" conveys the poet's persistent pursuit of ideals and the spirit of continuous striving. This metaphor for life's journey illustrates the idea that only through relentless effort and courage to climb higher can one break through limitations and achieve greater goals. This method of expression adds a layer of artistic beauty to Tang landscape poetry, making it a treasured part of ancient Chinese literature.

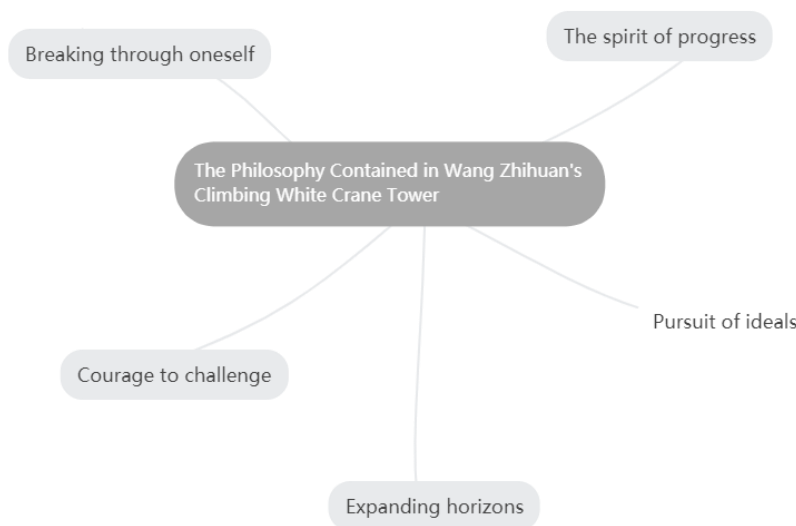


Figure 1. The Philosophy Contained in Wang Zhihuan’s Climbing White Crane Tower

4. The Aesthetic Value of the Artistic Conception in Tang Dynasty Landscape Poetry

4.1. Diverse Styles

The artistic conception in Tang poetry is like a vibrant and colorful painting. Throughout the High Tang, Mid-Tang, and Late Tang periods, the poetic style remained diverse and innovative, with complete thematic development (Table 2). In Wang Wei's nature-themed poetry, he created a poetic scene where "there is painting in the poem, and poetry in the painting," with serene and beautiful poetry, revealing emotions within the scenery. His famous landscape poem *Autumn Evening in the Mountains* reads: "After the new rain in the empty mountains, the autumn air arrives late. The bright moon shines through the pines, and clear springs flow over stones. Bamboo rustles as washerwomen return, and lotus sways as fishing boats descend." In this celebrated poem, Wang Wei conveys his noble feelings and pursuit of an ideal realm through the poetic scenery. There were many other outstanding landscape poets in the Tang Dynasty [10-11]. For instance, Liu Changqing's landscape poetry is concise and subtle, often depicting desolate scenes like solitary geese on cold islets, sorrowful apes on high ridges, and autumn mountains in the sunset, creating a sense of melancholy, distinct from the lively and peaceful tone of High Tang landscape poetry. Each poet had their unique style, creating vastly different artistic conceptions in their landscape poetry.

Table 2. Comparative Analysis of the Development Stages of Tang Dynasty Landscape Poetry

Periods	Time Span	Total Number of Painting-Inscribed Poems	Number of Landscape Painting-Inscribed Poems
Early Tang (618-712)	95	9	4
High Tang (713-766)	54	54	33
Mid Tang (767-824)	58	84	41
Late Tang and Five Dynasties (825-960)	136	110	54

4.2. Merging of Emotion and Scenery

In the Tang Dynasty, landscape poetry, with its unique artistic charm, became a treasure in the literary world. The fusion of emotion and scenery, as a prominent feature of the artistic conception of Tang landscape poetry, perfectly integrates emotions with natural landscapes, showcasing its high artistic value. Wang Guowei said: "Literature has two essential elements: scenery and emotion." The first type is scenery as the focus, with emotions hidden within it. The writer conceals emotions within the scenery, expressing them through vivid imagery. Although the poem does not directly express feelings, the emotions are implied, often making them more profound. For example, in Liu Zongyuan's *River Snow*, "A thousand mountains, no bird in flight; ten thousand paths, no human trace. A lone boat, an old man in a bamboo hat, fishing alone in the cold river snow," the scenery—mountains, paths, boats, rivers, and snow—are connected through words like "no," "gone," "lone," "cold," expressing a desolate, cold scene. Although there is no explicit mention of the poet's feelings, his solitude and bitterness are hidden in every word, as the scene becomes the emotion [12]. The second type focuses on emotions, with the scenery serving the emotions. Sometimes, without describing the scenery, the scene still vividly appears. In Li Shangyin's poetry, the emotional warmth is primary, and the scenery plays a supporting role. The third type merges scenery and emotion so seamlessly that they achieve perfect unity. Through delicate observation and deep insight, the poet blends natural scenery with inner emotions, creating countless landscape poems with profound artistic conception and sincere emotions.

4.3. Endlessly Evocative Charm

The new expansion of the artistic conception of Tang poetry is not only reflected in the inheritance and development of traditional landscape poetry but also in its unique extension. Poets no longer limited themselves to depicting tangible objects and emotions but pursued expressing infinite imagery and feelings with limited words. Wang Wei's landscape poetry is full of charm, described as "graceful, elegant, clear, and harmonious in tone, combining poetic sentiment, visual beauty, musicality, and the Zen-like pursuit of enlightenment," achieving remarkable artistic accomplishment. In his *Collection of Wangchuan*, for example, in the poem *In a Bamboo Lodge*, "I sit alone in the

quiet bamboo grove, playing the zither and whistling long. No one knows I am in the deep forest, but the bright moon comes to shine on me,” the real scene depicted is not as expansive as Tao Yuanming's poetry, but the meaning emphasizes distance and abstraction. As an experience, it has accumulated and become a classic model. The aesthetic beauty of Tang landscape poetry, which values the vivid imagery, represents a new height in aesthetic value, making the artistic conception of Tang poetry more profound and expansive, leaving readers with endless charm and reflection [13].

5. Conclusion

Tang and Song Dynasty poetry represent two significant periods in the history of Chinese literature, with landscape imagery holding an essential place in both. The landscape has a deeply rooted history and cultural significance in Chinese culture, and it has been admired and revered since ancient times. Since the Tang Dynasty, landscape has become the favorite subject of poets, who used landscape imagery to express their emotions, thoughts, and aesthetic tastes while also reflecting the cultural landscape and values of their time. In the artistic expression of the artistic conception in Tang poetry, the depiction of natural scenery, the expression of emotions, and the conveyance of philosophical insights intertwine, collectively forming the unique charm of Tang landscape poetry. It is evident that Tang Dynasty landscape poetry is a treasure of ancient Chinese literature, deserving of in-depth study and preservation.

References

- [1] YI, M. The aesthetic conception of Song and Yuan Dynasty Chinese landscape painting. *Art Sea*, v. 03, p. 9-63, 2023.
- [2] HAN, Y. The aesthetic implication of Da Zhongguang's Painting 'Hua Quan'. *Research on Fine Arts Education*, v. 232, p. 12-13, 2020.
- [3] WANG, X. *Anthology of Su Shi* [M]. Beijing: China Drama, 2009.08. p.112.
- [4] ZHANG, S. The relationship between the profoundness of Zong Baihua's artistic conception and German aesthetics. *Chinese Literary Criticism*, v. 01, p. 66-76+190, 2023.
- [5] LIU, Y. *Collected Works of Y. Liu*. Commented by J. Zhao and J. Jiang. Shanxi: Shanxi Ancient Books, 2004.
- [6] GONG, M.; SHAO, H. *Taoist Philosophy*. Changchun: Changchun Publishing House, 2007.
- [7] LIN, J. Analysis of the Philosophical Method in Chinese Painting. *Mass Literature and Art*, v. 20, p. 95-96, 2014.
- [8] WANG, H. An analysis of artistic conception structure based on the concept of 'Realm Layer': Revisiting Zong Baihua's theory of artistic conception. *Chinese Literary Criticism*, v. 33, p. 55-65+190, 2023.
- [9] XU, Y. The significance of artistic conception in Chinese and western painting creation. *Research on Fine Arts Education*, v. 291, p. 32-35, 2023.
- [10] XIA, K. Taste and contemplation of Tao: The state of free spirit in Zong Bingshan's landscape painting theory. *Chinese Art Research*, v. 01, p. 104-111, 2021.
- [11] GAO, P.; LI, X. Considerations on the treatment of figures and background in Chinese painting creation. *Beauty and Times (Chinese)*, v. 769, p. 28-29, 2018.
- [12] RUI, Y. Wang Wei's 'Emptiness': The aesthetic realm of poetry in Zen Buddhism. *Cultural Information*, v. 810, p. 70-71, 2018.
- [13] ZHANG, Y. The construction of Dao, Objects, Body, and the concept of 'Nature' in Laozi. *Journal of Studies of the Masters*, v. 02, p. 12-22, 2021.