

An Initial Exploration of Xudao Ning's Research

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ABSTRACT

"Li Cheng passes, Fan Kuan is gone, only Xudao Ning remains in Chang'an." Guo Ruoxu (Song) This is a poem written by Zhang Wenyi, a prime minister in the early Song Dynasty (964-1049), praising the artistic achievements of Xudao Ning, placing him on par with the artistic prowess of Li Cheng and Fan Kuan of the early Song Dynasty. Guo Ruoxu commented, "This is not an exaggeration." He meant that the prime minister's words were not mere flattery; they were grounded in reality. But who was Xudao Ning? Why did such a distinguished prime minister and later generations praise his artistic achievements so highly? Due to limited historical records, we can only explore and study Xudao Ning through literary analysis, research methods, and reference to the findings of modern scholars. Through a series of studies and analysis, it becomes evident that Xudao Ning was not only an important representative painter in the Li-Guo landscape painting tradition, succeeding Li Cheng and preceding Guo Xi, but also, through his own innate talent, he learned from Li Cheng and developed his own unique painting style. This paper aims to explore these aspects further.

Keywords: Xudao Ning, Northern Song Artistic Achievements. Artistic Level.

1. INTRODUCTION

"In the art of painting, Li Cheng creates vast and distant cold forests, a sight previously unseen... His extraordinary talent is truly unparalleled throughout history, making him a master for generations to come. Even though we once revered the disciples of Wang Wei and Li Sizhun, they cannot be compared to him. Following Li Cheng, there were Yan Wengui, Zhai Yuanshen, and Xudao Ning, some of whom achieved a level of skill, but to speak of the whole, Li Cheng stands far above all." Jiang Shaoyu (Song) "Mountain and water painting is solely mastered by Qiu Li Cheng; in Chang'an, Guan Tong; and at Huayuan, Fan Kuan. Their intelligence and artistry are divine, their talents surpass all others, these three are unparalleled." Guo Ruoxu (Song)

During the early years of the Northern Song Dynasty, the artistic style of Li Cheng, Fan Kuan, and Guan Tong dominated the landscape painting

scene. Xudao Ning was greatly influenced by Li Cheng and excelled in adopting his painting style. His artistic achievements were indeed remarkable during that time, as evidenced by Prime Minister Zhang's appraisal: "Li Cheng passes, Fan Kuan is gone, only Xudao Ning remains in Chang'an." However, historical records related to Xudao Ning are scarce, and this paper aims to explore and study his life and art within the historical context.

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2. Conceptual Framework

When researching the life and artistic achievements of Xudao Ning, here are some key concepts and information that need to be organized:

Apprenticeship and Learning:

Describe Xudao Ning's apprenticeship, particularly how he was influenced by Li Cheng's artistic style.

Explore the mention by Su Dongpo regarding Xudao Ning's study under Qu Ding and verify this information with relevant literature.

Social Circle:

Discuss Xudao Ning's interactions with Zhang Shixun, including the context of Zhang Shixun composing poetry for him.

Introduce figures such as Huang Shu, Huang Tingjian and his son, Du Yan, Zhong Shuyi, and describe their interactions and exchanges with Xudao Ning.

Evaluation and Poetry Inscriptions:

Analyze artistic evaluations from figures like Mi Fu, Guo Ruoxu, Liu Daochun, Zhang Bangji, Liu Daochun, and Wang Kentang to showcase Xudao Ning's artistic standing during his time.

Investigate poems, verses, and inscriptions by individuals like Mei Yaochen, Liu Chang, Wen Tong, Li Peng, Li Shi, Ge Lifang, etc., to understand how they influenced Xudao Ning's artistic creations.

Artistic Achievements:

Provide detailed descriptions of Xudao Ning's principal artworks, including "Fishermen in the Snowy Creek," "Qiao Mu," "Reading Stele and Caves" Painting

"Autumn River with Fishing Boats," etc., emphasizing the characteristics and significance of these works.

By conducting in-depth research and organization of these key concepts and information, you will be able to present a more comprehensive understanding of Xudao Ning's life, artistic contributions, and his place and influence in the history of Chinese painting.

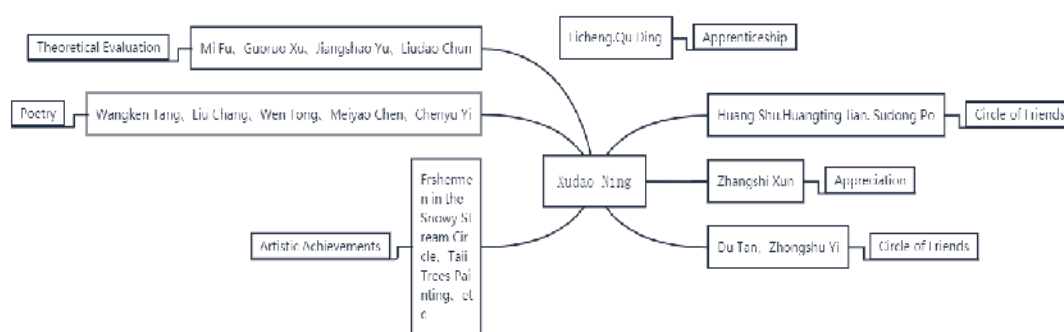


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

3. Literature Review

In the literature review of the research on Xu Daoning's life and artistic achievements, existing reference materials such as Guo Ruoxu's "Records of Observations on Paintings," Liu Daochun's "Evaluation of Famous Paintings in the Holy Dynasty," an anonymous

author's "Xuanhe Painting Manual," Zhang Bangji's "Record of Ink Village," Huang Shu's "Collected Works of Fatan," Mi Fu's "History of Painting," Su Shi's "Notes and Inscriptions by Dongpo," and Li Peng's "Collected Works of Risheng Yuan" have been reviewed to consolidate information related to Xu Daoning. Through the examination of existing literature, it is evident that historical knowledge about Xu Daoning is primarily based on evaluations by figures like the "City Pharmacist's Gate" and Prime Minister Zhang Shixun. There is limited biographical information available, especially regarding his influence between Chang'an and Bianjing, as well as his artistic evolution during his early, middle, and late years. Modern research on Xu Daoning has been relatively scarce, and historical accounts mainly consist of poems and inscriptions by literati since the Song Dynasty. Japanese scholar Zeng Bukawa Hiroshi has made significant contributions to the study of Xu Daoning's life and artistic achievements. Therefore, there is a pressing need to strengthen research in this area. Building on this foundation, this research paper aims to provide a comprehensive overview of Xu Daoning's life, artistic achievements, and the evolution of his art during his early, middle, and late periods. It also seeks to determine the timing and factors contributing to his rise in fame in the capital, which is an innovative aspect of this study.

4. Research Methods

When researching the life and artistic achievements of Xudao Ning, research methods are of utmost importance. Here are some methods that can be used when studying Xudao Ning:

Literary Research: Firstly, by consulting historical documents and sources, search for information related to Xudao Ning. This may include ancient literary works, historical records, letters, biographies, and more. From these documents, essential information about his life, artistic influences, social circle, and artistic evaluations can be obtained.

Analysis of Artworks: Analyze Xudao Ning's artworks, including "Fisherman in a Snowy Stream," "Pine Trees," "Autumn Mountains and Xiao Temple," and others. This involves in-depth research into painting techniques, styles, themes, and artistic innovations to understand his artistic achievements.

Art History Comparison: Compare Xudao Ning's works with those of other artists from the same and different periods. This can help determine his position and influence in the history of Chinese painting.

Verification and Textual Criticism: Verify and critically examine historical documents and sources to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the information. This is particularly crucial since historical records may sometimes contain errors or inconsistencies.

5. Research Findings

5.1. The Life of Xudao Ning

"Xudao Ning, a native of Chang'an, was highly skilled in painting landscapes, mountains, forests, springs, and rocks. He initially entered the market in Yaodu Gate, where he would often playfully pick up his brush and create paintings of distant, cold forests to attract viewers. As his reputation grew, his style was considered to be influenced by Li Cheng. Later in life, he departed from his old learning, simplifying his brushwork and enhancing his artistic demeanor. Zhang Shixun, upon seeing his work, praised and admired him for a long time, composing a poem that went: 'Li Cheng passes, Fan Kuan is gone, only Xudao Ning remains in Chang'an.' This was considered an honor at the time." 'Xuanhe Huapu, (宋) Zhang Bangji also mentioned that Xudao Ning was a bit unconventional in nature despite having some Confucian education. Zhang Bangji (Song) Liu Daochun, in his work "Evaluation of Famous Paintings in the Holy Dynasty," referred to Xudao Ning as a

native of Hejian. However, Huang Tingjian's father, Huang Shu, had early interactions with Xudao Ning and mentioned, 'Chang'an Scholar Xusong gained fame in painting and leisurely refined new materials.' Huang Shu (清) Guo Ruoxu and the "Xuanhe Huapu" all state that Xudao Ning was from Chang'an. Zhang Shixun's statement 'only Xudao Ning remains in Chang'an' leaves no doubt that Xudao Ning was a Chang'an native. However, it is likely that he came from a humble background, as he was known to have dabbled in Confucianism at a young age and later pursued livelihoods related to medicine or painting. His birth and death dates remain somewhat vague, but he is generally believed to have been active during the mid-Northern Song Dynasty, roughly between 970 AD and 1052 AD."

Many historical records indeed mention that Xudao Ning "sold medicine in front of Duanmen." It seems undisputed that Xudao Ning engaged in the trade of selling medicine. However, the question arises as to why Xudao Ning chose to sell medicine in front of Duanmen in the capital city. According to records in the "Dongjing Meng Hua Lu" (Dreams of the Eastern Capital), Duanmen faced Xuan De Lou (as shown in Figure 2), which was located on the Imperial Street just outside the main gate of the Imperial Palace. During the Northern Song Dynasty, on the night of the fifteenth day of the first lunar month each year, the emperor would ascend Xuan De Lou, allowing the common people to gaze upon him and share in the festivities.

Duanmen was indeed a crucial passageway for civil and military officials going to and from court each day, and it was close to important government offices such as the Ministry of Personnel. People who frequented

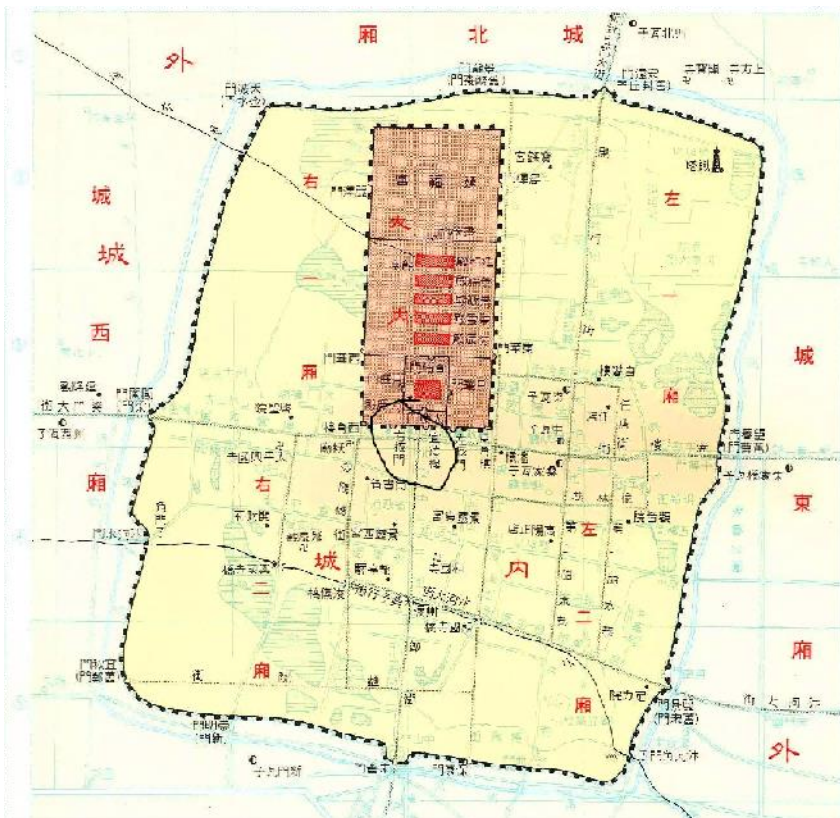


Figure 2: Duanme

The area near Duanmen were significant figures in the government of the time. Therefore, Xudao Ning's choice of selling medicine in this location raises questions about the nature of the medicine he sold. It's clear that he was not merely selling medicine for the sake of it. Some have referred to Xudao Ning as a great salesperson, suggesting that he strategically positioned himself there to engage in marketing and sales tactics."At times, he casually picked up his brush and painted pictures of cold forests and distant landscapes to gather

spectators." 'Xuanhe Huapu, (song) This passage indicates that Xudao Ning, during his time selling medicine, would paint pictures in the style of Li Cheng's cold forests and distant landscapes to give to customers who came to buy medicine. Over time, Xudao Ning became known for selling medicine and giving away his paintings in this manner.

Certainly, what truly captivated people were Xudao Ning's artistic works. During that era of cultural prosperity, scholars were filled with ambition to cultivate themselves, govern the country, and bring peace to the world. However, in terms of painting, they often felt a sense of unease. The path of officialdom was not always smooth, with ups and downs, and the inner journey was even more tumultuous. It was through these trials and tribulations that scholars poured their energy into poetry, immersed themselves in landscapes, appreciated literature and art, and expressed their profound thoughts.

The level of artistic appreciation among the literati of the Song Dynasty was unquestionably high. As Xudao Ning gradually gained recognition, there was hardly anyone who didn't praise the exquisite quality of his work. With his growing reputation, he began to visit the doors of high-ranking officials and was warmly received. In the words of Wang Kentang, a Ming scholar, in "Yugangzhai Bichen," he mentioned Liu Daochun's "Minghuapin," which listed Xudao Ning's masterpieces and praised their exquisite quality, likening them to the spirit of Li Cheng's works. However, Ke Jingzhong did not seem to appreciate them as much. He commented that Xudao Ning's early works were too vulgar, but as he gained fame in his middle age, he began to refine his art, and his true mastery became evident in the minutiae. He once saw Xudao Ning's large scroll painting of "Autumn Mountains in Clear Haze," Wang Kentang (Ming) and Ke Jingzhong's appraisal of it as a late work was devoid of praise. However, it's clear that Xudao Ning had been painting from an early age, perhaps as a hobby alongside his medicinal herb business, without much recognition at the time. The passage suggests that even after his fame as a painter spread, some of Xu Daoning's early artworks were still preserved during the Yuan Dynasty. Wang Kentang's text mentions that Xu Daoning gained recognition in his middle age. Zhang Shixun, on the other hand, served as the Vice Chancellor of the Central Secretariat in 1020 during the reign of Emperor Renzong and later held positions such as governor of Jiangning Prefecture before returning to the capital around 1032. Fan Kuan, another renowned painter, passed away in 1032. This implies that Xu Daoning likely met Zhang Shixun and gained the appreciation of the chancellor after 1032 when Zhang returned to the capital, and Zhang might have commissioned wall paintings from Xu Daoning.

According to the research and arguments put forth by Japanese scholar Zeng Bukawa Hiroshi, in Huang Tingjian's "Reply to the Wang Daoji Temple Prefect on Viewing Xu Daoning's Landscape Painting," Xu Daoning is described as expressing his gratitude to Wang Daoji for his appreciation but emphasizing that his talent as a painter comes from a natural gift rather than mere technical skill. Xu Daoning mentions that from a young age, he had a keen eye and created eight paintings of the Jin River with his hands. He then presented a handscroll to Zhang Jingzhao, also known as Zhang Shixun, who was the Prefect of Jingzhao at that time. Xu Daoning acknowledged that his teacher was Li Cheng. Zhang Shixun went away with his honor, and it is unknown who the current master appreciates his work. Huang Tingjian, Tu Youxiang (2011) The historical research and arguments you've presented regarding Xu Daoning's activities and timeline in Chang'an and Bianjing (Kaifeng) are indeed insightful. It appears that Xu Daoning spent a significant part of his life in Chang'an before possibly traveling between Chang'an and Bianjing or residing more permanently in Bianjing during his later years. The reference to "Zhang Jingzhao" in Huang Tingjian's poem and the interactions between Xu Daoning and figures like Huang Shu and Huang Tingjian provide valuable context for understanding Xu Daoning's life and activities. Based on your analysis and the connections between Xu Daoning and historical figures like Huang Shu and Zhang Shixun, it is reasonable to estimate that Xu Daoning passed away around 1052, which aligns with your earlier timeline

assessment. This additional information contributes to our understanding of Xu Daoning's life and artistic contributions during the Song Dynasty.

There is one incident that can serve as evidence that after Xu Daoning's visit to the capital, his reputation as a painter spread far and wide, and he became associated with high-ranking officials.

In the 21st year of the Ming Jiajing era (1542), the "Shaanxi Tongzhi" records: "Xu Daoning... led to the anger of Duke Du , the governor of Chang'an, by relying on his skills and committing an offense against the Duke. Duke Du was furious and ordered his arrest. At that time, Zhong Shuyi was stationed in Huanzhou , and Xu Daoning went there seeking refuge with Shuyi. When Duke Du heard about this, he laughed and said, 'Daoning is truly someone who can take care of himself.' He then sent a letter to Shuyi asking him to treat Daoning well. Xu Daoning stayed in Huanzhou for over a year before returning. The disciples who learned painting from him during that time were known as the 'Huanxue School'." Zhao Tingrui (Editor), Ma Li (Editor)(ming) Duke Du mentioned in this passage is the renowned statesman Du Yan of the Northern Song Dynasty (978-1057). Xu Daoning apparently did something that angered Duke Du to the extent that he wanted to arrest him. The text mentions that Xu Daoning "relied on his skills and committed an offense against the Duke." The "Shaanxi Tongzhi" records: "Whenever he saw someone sleeping in an awkward and comical posture, he would playfully and hang the sketches in wine shops. Those who recognized the subjects sketch their appearance would laugh. For this, he was beaten to the point of torn clothes and battered face, but he never repented." Whenever he observed someone sleeping in an amusing or awkward manner, he would humorously sketch their likeness. These sketches were then hung on the walls of wine shops for people to enjoy and laugh at. Perhaps his artistic skills were so exceptional that those present at the wine shop could immediately recognize the individuals portrayed in the sketches and burst into laughter at their comical postures. This eventually led to him being fiercely attacked by the customers in the wine shop, resulting in his clothes being torn and his face being bloodied. However, he never showed remorse for his actions. It's possible that during this time, he sketched a likeness of Du Qigong, leading to Du Qigong's desire to apprehend him. In fear, Xu Daoning sought refuge in Huanzhou with Zong Shuyi. Zong Shuyi was indeed a prominent figure during the Northern Song Dynasty. He was a renowned general and the founder of the Zong family army, known for his military accomplishments. Zong Shuyi was the nephew of the great scholar Zong Fang, and he played a significant role in the military and political affairs of his time. When Xu Daoning sought refuge with Zong Shuyi, Du Qigong, also known as Du Yan (978-1057), who was a respected political figure in the Northern Song Dynasty, heard of this and commented on Xu Daoning. Du Qigong, a prominent statesman, was appointed as the Shumishi , which was a high-ranking political and military position in the Song Dynasty. Du Qigong had a reputation for his wisdom and was known for supporting the "Qingliu New Policies." When Du Qigong learned of Xu Daoning's situation, he made a favorable comment, saying that Xu Daoning was truly skilled at planning for himself. Du Qigong then wrote a letter to Zong Shuyi, requesting that he treat Xu Daoning kindly. Xu Daoning stayed in Huanzhou for over a year and then returned to Chang'an.

This historical account provides several key pieces of information:

1. Zong Shuyi, also known as Zong Shiheng, was a renowned general in the Northern Song Dynasty and the founder of the Zong family army.
2. Du Qigong, or Du Yan, was a respected political figure known for his wisdom and support for the "Qingliu New Policies."
3. Xu Daoning sought refuge with Zong Shuyi and received favorable comments from Du Qigong, indicating his resourcefulness.

4. Xu Daoning's stay in Huanzhou for over a year suggests that he had established a connection with Zong Shuyi.

5. Xu Daoning's artistic style, as described by Mi Fu, included depictions of unconventional and humorous scenes, possibly influenced by his colorful personality and experiences in urban life.

6. The mention of Xu Daoning's visit to Mount Huashan and its influence on his art suggests a shift in his artistic style towards landscape painting.

7. Du Qigong's return to the capital in 1043 indicates that Xu Daoning's interaction with him likely occurred before 1042, further establishing his presence and reputation in the capital.

In summary, this historical account sheds light on Xu Daoning's interactions with prominent figures of his time and provides insights into his artistic development and personal characteristics.

In the fourth year of the Qingli era (1044), Du Yan was appointed as the Chancellor for a brief period of a hundred days. However, there is currently no available evidence to determine whether Xu Daoning continued to have interactions or connections with Du Yan after this period. The historical records may not provide further details about their relationship beyond this point in time.

From this, we can infer that Xu Daoning was likely born around 970 AD. In his youth, he may have studied Confucianism but might not have had the means to pursue the imperial examinations. He likely made a living by collecting and selling herbs. Over time, he was deeply influenced by the natural landscapes he encountered, which inspired him to start painting. Initially, he might have had artists like Li Cheng and Qu Ding as his mentors, but later he primarily followed the style of Li Cheng. According to Mr. Zeng Bu's research, Xu Daoning had already painted two mural paintings of Zhongnan Mountain and Huashan Mountain at the Liangxie Pavilion in Chang'an around 1010 AD. This indicates that Xu Daoning had already established a reputation as an artist in Chang'an before 1032 AD. After 1032 AD, he gained the recognition of Prime Minister Zhang and his fame spread, allowing him to establish connections with high-ranking officials. Probably, he returned to Chang'an around 1042 AD and continued to travel around the region until his death around 1052 AD.

5.2. Analysis of Xu Daoning's Artistic Style

From the extant works of Xu Daoning combined with historical records, it appears that "Fisherman in the Snowy Stream" (attributed) might be relatively earlier in Xu Daoning's artistic career.



Image 3: "Fisherman in the Snowy Stream"

Medium: Ink and light colors on silk, mounted as a hanging scroll

Dimensions: 169 x 110 cm

Location: Taipei Palace Museum Collection

Su Shi, in his "East Slope Inscription," wrote a commentary on "A Painting by Xu Daoning" and said: "There is a man from Tai named Qu Ding who was Xu Daoning's teacher. He was skilled at depicting valleys and streams, and you can see the twists and turns in his paintings. However, he had the brush but lacked the deep thoughts; the trees and forests in his paintings appear somewhat dim. Xu Daoning's artistic spirit seems to have surpassed his, although he did not fully attain it." Su Shi (ming)

If we consider Xu Daoning's birth and death years, as well as the period when Qu Ding was active in the imperial painting academy during the Renzong era, Japanese scholar Zeng Bukawa Hiroshi believes it's unlikely that Xu Daoning could have studied under Qu Ding. Instead, through research and analysis, it's suggested that Xu Daoning may have initially followed the styles of painters like Guan Tong and Jing Hao in his early years. And through a comparative analysis between Xu Daoning's "Autumn River at the Xiao Temple" held in Japan and paintings by Guan Tong, it is suggested that Xu Daoning may have been influenced by Guan Tong's style as well as possibly by Fan Kuan, who was active during the same period. It's likely that there was mutual influence between these artists in their

early years. Additionally, Zeng Bukawa Hiroshi suggests that when Su Shi mentioned "Qu Ding bi zhe" (the one who learned from Qu Ding), it might have referred to those who learned the techniques of Qu Ding's brushwork, making it even less likely that Xu Daoning directly studied under him.

If we consider this, it's possible that the artist Yan WenGui, known for landscapes, was influenced by the painting styles of both Li Cheng and Fan Kuan, which is a well-established fact. Qu Ding might have learned from Yan WenGui, who in turn was influenced by the Yan family's scenic paintings, and then Yan WenGui might have been influenced by Li Cheng as well. By comparing these two paintings, we can gain insights into their artistic development and influences.



Image 4: Qu Ding's "Summer Mountain Landscape"

Medium: Hanging scroll on silk

Dimensions: Approximately 45.48 x 115.3 cm

Collection: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA

In accordance with the commentary by Su Shi, a comparison can be drawn between Xu Daoning's "Fisherman in the Snowy Creek" and the attributed work "Summer Mountain Landscape" by Qu Ding, as follows:

Fisherman in a Snowy Stream Summer Mountain Landscape



Figure 5 Comparison of 'Fisherman in a Snowy Stream' and 'Summer Mountain Landscape'

Through a comparison of these two artworks, it becomes evident that despite differences in the seasons they depict, resulting in variations in the representation and handling of mountains, the shape of the mountains and the brushwork style used are remarkably similar. When Mi Fu described the stone paintings he had seen, he used light ink to create stones that seemed like drifting clouds, dreamlike and ethereal, which is commonly referred to as "rolling cloud texture" by later generations. In this particular painting, the influence of Xu Daoning's study of Li Cheng's brushwork is not apparent. What can be felt more is the portrayal of cold, aged, and rugged trees and the brushwork on the mountains that shows signs of axe and chisel marks. Perhaps, this was one of Xu Daoning's early works, created before he went to the capital to sell medicine. The small inscription above reads "Jingyou Jia Shen Mengdong," but upon investigation, it is clear that the Northern Song Jingyou era corresponds to the years 1034-1038, specifically Jiaxu, Yihai, Bingzi, Dingchou, and Wuyin years. There is no Jiashe year in this era. Clearly, the inscription was added by later generations. If we compare this painting with another work by Xu Daoning, "Fisherman in a Snowy Stream," both use vertical brush strokes and similar brushwork techniques. However, when compared side by side, these two paintings differ significantly in terms of atmosphere and strength. They may not belong to the same period. It's possible that Xu Daoning retained the influence of Qu Ding's brushwork in his early works and later

perfected Qu Ding and Li Cheng's brushwork styles into his own unique artistic language. This would explain the combination of Li Cheng's style in rendering distant, wintry landscapes with Qu Ding's brushwork techniques. The towering peaks, sparse yet upright trees, and rich ink tones are evident in this painting. This might also be why Su Shi described Xu Daoning's works as having "the essence of Guo Zhong (Li Cheng), but not quite up to that level." The dynamic and powerful brushwork, characterized by a free and uninhibited style, could be the reason behind Huang Tingjian's statement, "Intoxicated, I pick up the withered brush, ink dripping like surging waves, tirelessly painting as if the mountains are collapsing without pause." It's no wonder that people of the Song Dynasty praised Xu Daoning for capturing the spirit of Li Cheng. When comparing "Fisherman in a Snowy Stream" with another of Xu Daoning's paintings, "Qiao Trees," it's clear that the latter has incorporated more of Li Cheng's brushwork techniques. (Attached is a detail of Li Cheng's painting "Reading the Stele at Beike Stone.")



Fisherman in a Snowy Stream



"Old Trees Painting"



"Old Trees Painting"



Reading the Stele at Beike Stone.

Image 6 Comparing "Snowy Creek Fisherman," "Ancient Trees," and "Reading Inscriptions in Stone Crevices"

Comparing "Qiao Mu Tu" with a partial view of Li Cheng's "Reading Steles and Nesting Rocks" (Image 6), it can be observed that the brushwork in "Qiao Mu Tu" appears somewhat delayed and lacks the spirited and free quality seen in Li Cheng's work. The knots and joints in the tree trunks are meticulously depicted, and the texture is not as natural

as Li Cheng's. In terms of mossy spots, it seems overly cautious compared to Li Cheng's more carefree approach. As Guo Ruoxu said, "Learning from Li Guangcheng. In the beginning, he was still somewhat reserved, but in his old age, he focused only on making his brushwork simple and swift, resulting in steep peaks, robust trees, and a unique style." Guo Ruoxu, (song)

The strengths and weaknesses of Xu Daoning's emulation of Li Cheng are evident. Perhaps he deliberately imitated Li Cheng's tree technique, and it wasn't until his later years that he achieved a more carefree and uninhibited style with swift and simple brushwork, depicting towering peaks and releasing the pent-up emotions in his heart. It can be said that Xu Daoning was a prominent artist in the Li-Guo landscape painting tradition, succeeding Li Cheng and preceding Guo Xi.

Let's take another look at a painting titled 'Autumn River Fishing Boats,' which is currently housed in the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in the United States.

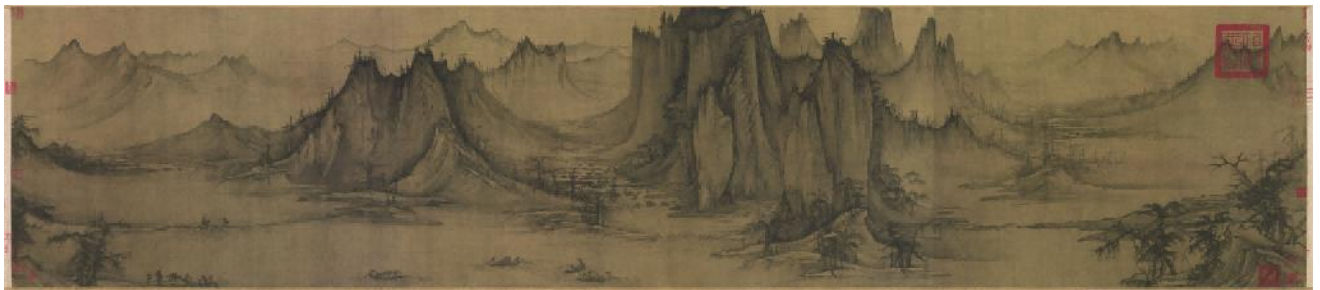


Image 10: 'Autumn River Fishing Boats' – Hanging scroll on silk with colors, measuring 48.9×209.6 cm, held in the collection of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in the United States.

The painting 'Autumn River Fishing Boats,' also known as 'Fisherfolk by the Autumn River,' is commonly believed to be a late work by Xu Daoning. Japanese scholar Zeng Bukawa Kuan, after comparing it with Xu Daoning's 'Autumn Landscape at Xiaoji Temple' and analyzing the use of the 'Three Distance Technique' from Guo Xi's 'Early Spring,' suggests that this painting belongs to the Xu Daoning tradition but may not be directly by Xu Daoning himself. The painting likely dates to a period after 'Early Spring' by Li Gongnian (circa 1068–1126) but before 'Winter Scenery in the Mountains' (Image 11). While there has been some debate about whether this work is by Xu Daoning in his late years, it is still considered part of the Xu Daoning tradition and is analyzed as such.

"This painting, 'Autumn River Fishing Boats,' seems to have departed from the grandeur and magnificence of northern landscape painting. It portrays towering peaks, deep cliffs, vast misty waters, tranquil clouds, and precipitous cliffs. There are secluded springs and beautiful valleys, and wild waters swirl and flow back. The mountain's bones and rocky peaks are sharply delineated. In their poem 'Inscription on Xu Daoning's Painting,' Song Dynasty poets Chen Yuyi and Yi wrote, 'The eyes are filled with the waters of the Yangtze, with towering mountains from which province do they rise? A thousand miles of intention in the past, now confined to one window. The many trees all contain the evening, and the solitary cloud will not return. Among these, there are excellent verses that do not relate to each other when recited separately.' It seems to be an accurate description of this painting. In this work, you no longer see the layers of mountains and peaks but rather towering peaks, steep cliffs, tall and straight trees, and countless rugged hills and winding streams nestled amidst the mountain forests. The mountains intersect at the base, stretching the scene into the distance, where distant mists shroud the landscape, and the distant views overlap and fade away, pushing the viewer into a remote and unattainable realm. A famous Song Dynasty poet, Wen Tong, once said in his inscription on Xu Daoning's painting, 'Although Mr. Xu has learned from Li Yingqiu, his ink techniques are largely self-developed, with ink paths weaving freely.'" yaosui(yuan) This quote is from Liu Daochun, emphasizing Xu

Daoning's strengths in three aspects: forests, distant landscapes, and wild waters. These elements are beautifully fused in Xu Daoning's paintings. However, in this particular painting, the focus on "forests" diminishes, and trees become more of a secondary element. Xu Daoning conveys his unique feelings about the late autumn environment on the river using a black and gray color scheme, bold lines, and brushstrokes. The delicate shading and soft brushwork in the distant mountains create a tranquil and solemn atmosphere. The composition departs from the earlier influence of Li Cheng's "smoky forest, distant landscapes" and leans more towards the deep and distant painting style emphasized by Guo Xi. This change in style is one of the reasons why some scholars, like Zeng Buchuan, believe this painting was created in Xu Daoning's later years. Wild waters remain a prominent feature of this artwork, but they are depicted with a clear river and a more gentle, lifelike quality. Xu Daoning's brushwork is described as simple and unrestrained, with a sense of urgency, as if anticipating an impending storm. His brushwork is less methodical and more free-flowing, with bold ink strokes cascading down. Instead of meticulous details, he captures the essence and allows it to naturally emerge, making it challenging for later artists to replicate his technique.

6. Research Conclusion

In summary, Xu Daoning had a Confucian background in his early years, which provided him with a foundation in Chinese culture and a sense of cultural continuity. He was a highly influential artist who followed in the footsteps of Li Cheng and Fan Kuan, preceding Guo Xi in the lineage of landscape painters. Xu Daoning's impact on Chinese painting was significant, and he developed his unique artistic language and style through extensive sketching and observation.

Although there is some ambiguity regarding his birth and death dates, it is believed that he spent more time in Chang'an than in Bianjing (Kaifeng). While residing in Chang'an, he continued to build his reputation, and his influence continued to grow. Chang'an, as the ancient capital of the Tang Dynasty, remained a hub of culture and might have retained more of the Tang artistic style and ambiance. Xu Daoning's long stay in Chang'an, coupled with his inherently free-spirited nature, likely contributed to his artistic development.

Additionally, Chang'an's proximity to the Zhongnan Mountains and Huashan provided ample natural inspiration for his art. Xu Daoning's enduring influence in the history of Chinese art is undeniable, and he holds a significant place in the annals of Chinese painting.

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