CHAPTER III

# *Śūnya*: Immanent and Transcendent: Investigating Meanings of Void Through Art's Space

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## INTRODUCTION

The void space we encounter in nature evokes a certain urge in the mind. The open sky seen from the mountaintop, or even from the plain, stirs our sentiments of freedom and calls forth our longing for 'the world further away'. When we come across a cave in the mountains, we naturally pause to look at what is inside. A void space 'enclosed' within gross rocks invites us to move 'inwards'. As it is clear in our outwardly and inwardly response to the void space in nature, the void space is not merely empty or vacuous.

Before we enter the discussion about the void space, *Śūnya*, in arts, we will look at the examples of *Śūnya* explicitly exhibited in arts (Figs. III.1 and III.2). The examples reproduced here have respectively Buddhist and Taoist affiliations. *Śūnya*, being generally translated 'Void' or 'Emptiness', has been one of the most important objectives in Buddhism and Taoism. But, we should keep in mind that the adjective term *Śūnya* has been preferred to *Śūnyatā*, a noun, which means *Śūnya* is not understood in a definite term, but rather as a state.[1]

For the discussion of *Śūnya* in arts and its relevant question the intrinsic problem of form, it is appropriate to pay attention to the an-iconic representation of the Gautama Buddha in early Buddhist arts. Before the anthropomorphic representation gained its popularity, Gautama Buddha, the *tathāgata* (the One who crossed over; Enlightened One) was, in the best way, represented by the symbols of footprint, *cakra*, wheel or an empty seat, etc. Here, we have a relief panel from Amaravati, depicting the Prince Siddhartha's Great Departure (Fig. III.1). In the panel, a horse, beautifully mounted, is pulled forth by a horseman. These figures are the prince Siddhartha's horse and attendant. Their master is physically absent in the scene, as if he is no more in the physical plane. The city gate, which may signify the exit and entrance of *saṁsāra*, stands alone behind the Master who has no form in the relief. Siddhartha's attendant and faithful horse, though they are in a deep sorrow at losing their master, carry on their duty of serving his volition. The flying beings in the sky are looking down over the great departure of the future Buddha. The young prince is ushered to his path of liberation by heavenly sound suggested by the

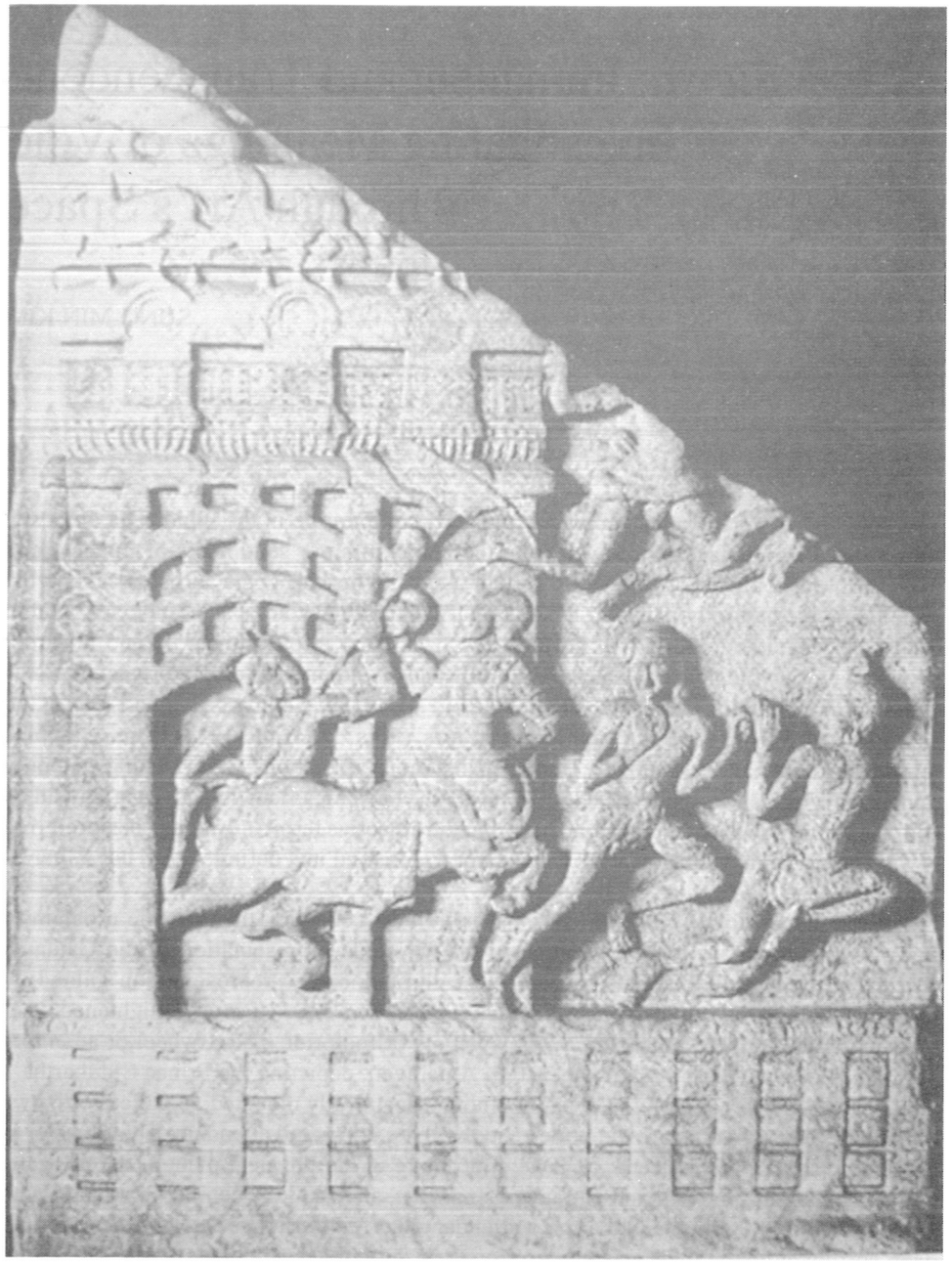

Figure III.1. *Great Departure*, a Relief from the *Stūpa* of Amaravati, second century AD.



flapping wings of these flying beings in the sky. Here, the void space is methodically adapted to represent someone who is not limited to a physical form.

The above example brings forth our awareness of the effectiveness of not representing the real essence. As is implied here, a physical form is limited; it tends to be distorted due to the limited angle of our perception that is conditioned by our sense-impression and ideation. Thus, here *Śūnya* is the result of not limiting the Essence or Spirit within the boundary of physical form. It is an artistic solution that copes with the intrinsic problem of physical form.

The next example may reflect one of our most common experiences of *Śūnya* in nature: vast spectacle (Fig. III.2). The painting is attributed to Hsia Kuei (active in the first quarter of the thirteenth century AD) of the Southern Sunga Dynasty.[2] A vast horizontal landscape is covered by a fragment of the painting titled 'Twelve Views from a Thatched Hut'. Here, it is the unfilled space that creates the sense of purity and openness in the painting. Figures are done with minimal brush strokes, completely by ink. Hazy air and water in distance, vaguely indicated just with a few ripples, emphasize the spatial clarity. As is clear here, the ideal of *Śūnya* is not specifically Buddhist, but it has been philosophically and spiritually sought for in a different tradition such as Taoism. Its parallel concept in Taoism is termed *Wu* (Nothingness) or *Hsü* (Vacant). What is remarkable in this painting is the painter's remoteness from the actual objects, allowing a vast view of nature. Here, *Śūnya* has the form of a long stretch of horizontal space which resulted from the painter's dispassionate contemplation of nature.

It is well known that the concept of *Śūnya* has been consciously nurtured as the kernel of philosophy and soteriology in Buddhism. We find a similar relationship between that of *Wu* or *Hsü* and Taoism.[3] As much as they are central in their respective philosophy and soteriology, *Śūnya* and *Wu* (or *Hsü*) would be a concept that would characterize also the aesthetics of Buddhism and Taoism, because arts fundamentally mirror the spirit that brings up a religion. At this point we ought to bear in mind that a certain preconception regarding the concept of *Śūnya* has to be cleared. We often confine the term *Śūnya*, in mental and psychic dimension, as a negative state where all the mental constructs are

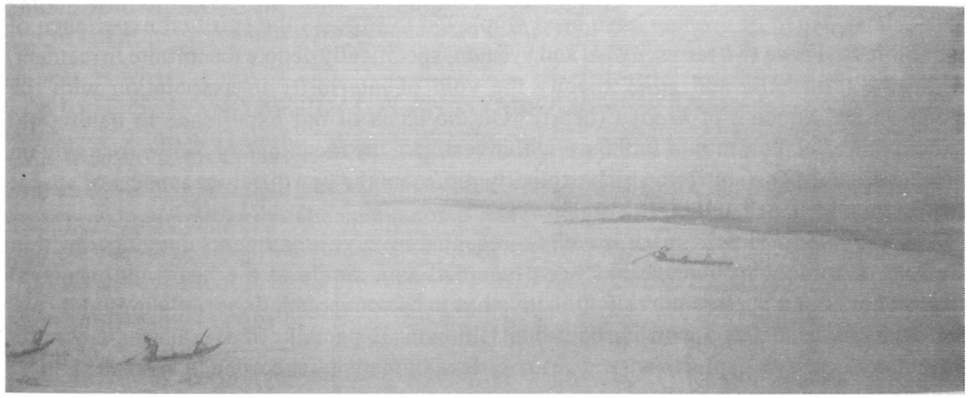

Figure III.2. Hsia Kuei, a fragment of the painting *Twelve Views from a Thatched Hut*, the first quarter of the thirteenth century AD, Southern Sunga Dynasty.

removed, as representatively advocated by the Theravada Buddhists. We often adopt analytical dialectics to explain *Śūnya* as negative Non-Being of reality or existence. However, the negation of phenomenal reality serves as the turning point where another level of reality or existence is revealed in our awareness. The development of Buddhist arts proves that this negation served to break the very basis of conventional thoughts and ways of perceiving phenomena. The disillusionment with the conventional definition about subject and object gave room for objective and disinterested observation of phenomena, which is the necessary condition for artistic pursuit and aesthetic experience.

While we look at the above examples, we come to realize how affluent the empty space is; how much we get inspired by the empty space; how comfortably the empty space allows us to be free and spontaneous. Yet, when we discuss *Śūnya* in arts with reference to the unfilled space in a painting or a relief panel, our discussion still remains in the domain of material space. Works of arts are created by means of constructing a new virtual space, having overcome the physical dimension of space. Therefore, if we retain our discussion of *Śūnya* to the unfilled void of physical space, not crossing over to the subtler level of art's space, we will fail to comprehend our experience of *Śūnya* or *Wu* in works of arts. Since works of arts are created to express and intensify our ordinary experiences, the investigation of experiencing *Śūnya* in arts may open the scope for an intense glimpse of subtler dimensions of *Śūnya*.

The present paper is about the art's space; the space we travel through to aesthetic experience. The paper has started with the illustrations of *Śūnya* that display the unfilled void allocated for artistic and truthful representation of the Ideal in art's space. The paper attempts throughout the text to analyse the space-experience revealed in works of arts and examine multiple dimensions of *Śūnya* in arts beyond its form of physical vacuity.

*Śūnya* in arts may have its fundamental source in our universal experiences of void space in nature. As briefly mentioned in the beginning, we can approach *Śūnya* taking into consideration its two revelations in nature: inner and outer, the enclosed cavity and the open vastness. These two aspects of void space have been also recognized in the ancient Indian traditions with specific connotation to spiritual dimension in that the space is the ground of experiencing the Ultimate, 'Brahman'.[4] Sanskrit terms with spatial connotation, particularly *ākāśa* or *vyoman* have been employed to express the spiritual experience of the Ultimate. These two terms, *ākāśa* and *vyoman*, specifically denote the infinite firmament, while the terms *kha* and *guhā* specify the void of interiority in association with the metaphysical concept of *hṛdaya* (heart).[5] On the basis of our experience in nature and philosophical elaboration of India, we will investigate the meanings of *Śūnya* focusing on two different artistic sources which explicitly represent the two different aspects of space: immanent and transcendent, *kha* and *vyoman*.

The *kha*-aspect of void space is well represented by cave monuments developed within the fold of Buddhism. A cave has been regarded as a simile of the heart and primeval space where our microcosmic self ultimately has to be converged. Especially in Buddhism, the cavity is associated with its doctrinal Ultimate. Especially, those in western India demonstrate active exploration and artistic development in accordance with the innate quality of cave space.

On the other hand, the vast open space, the *vyoman*-aspect of *Śūnya*, is a prominent artistic constituent in aesthetics of East Asian arts, especially, in that of landscape paintings.



The vast spectacle of a landscape without the close-up of an object is particularly characteristic of the Northern Sunga landscape paintings, conventionally called the 'Monumental Style' by art historians. A landscape painting with clear demarcation of foreground, middle ground and background in a vertical format presupposes that there is vast empty space in between the viewer and the objects of the landscape. Northern Sunga landscape paintings can be comprehended especially through their conceptual evolution within the Taoist context and their culmination in the establishment of Neo-Confucianism.

## *KHA*: BUDDHIST CAVE MONASTERIES IN WESTERN INDIA

The cave sites in western India, assignable from third or second century BC to the seventh century AD, have been considerable objects of attention from the beginning of scientific studies of Indian culture.[6] They have been viewed as a source of information with which one can reconstruct the history. However, they have scarcely been discussed with the focus on their primary *raison d'être*, that is, the space for religious practice.

A cave has been regarded as the archetypal womb, therefore, served as the most suitable place for religious rituals and meditation. Meanings and significance of Buddhist cave monuments will be unfolded only when we examine a visitor's experience of its space.[7]

## SYMBOLIC CONNOTATION OF CAVE EXCAVATION

The cavity has an age-long symbolic meaning, and Buddhist cave monasteries are distinguished in their optimal atmosphere for meditation.[8] They are symbolic monuments as much as a practical space for a religious institution. The cave temple is differentiated from the structural temple in the sense that it is plastic as much as architectural, innately having a methodological advantage for symbolic expression. Even the process of cave excavation adds to its symbolic significance. The creation of a cave temple starts from the act of digging gross rock materials. The pure void is unveiled and revealed, as the rock materials are removed. The further creative chiselling brings forth embellishing forms along with the cavity. In other words, the essential process of excavation is to recover a form latent in gross materials by means of 'emptying'.

## CAVE SPACE AND APSIDAL PLAN: SYMBOLISM OF *KHA*

As opposed to the open space offering us a freedom of direction, the cave is distinguished by its inwardly direction. The cave space has the drawing power of deep space that orients our movement inwardly. The spontaneous inwardness in the cave can be indirectly proved by the fact that 'the primeval cave man had created the most sacred ritual space so deep inside the cave that it was difficult to be reached'.[9] So when we are in a cave space, our movements are spontaneously oriented to the inner zone of space. The intrinsic nature of cave directing inwardly movement is verified by the fact that the apsidal form was constantly employed for the primary edifice, *caityagṛha* (prayer hall) of the Buddhist cave monastic complex, till cave excavations for Buddhist monasteries lost its momentum in the seventh century AD.[10] The tunnel-like form of apsidal structure organically blends with the inherent nature of cave space (Fig. III.3). The apsidal cave *caityagṛha* with the *stūpa* in the innermost

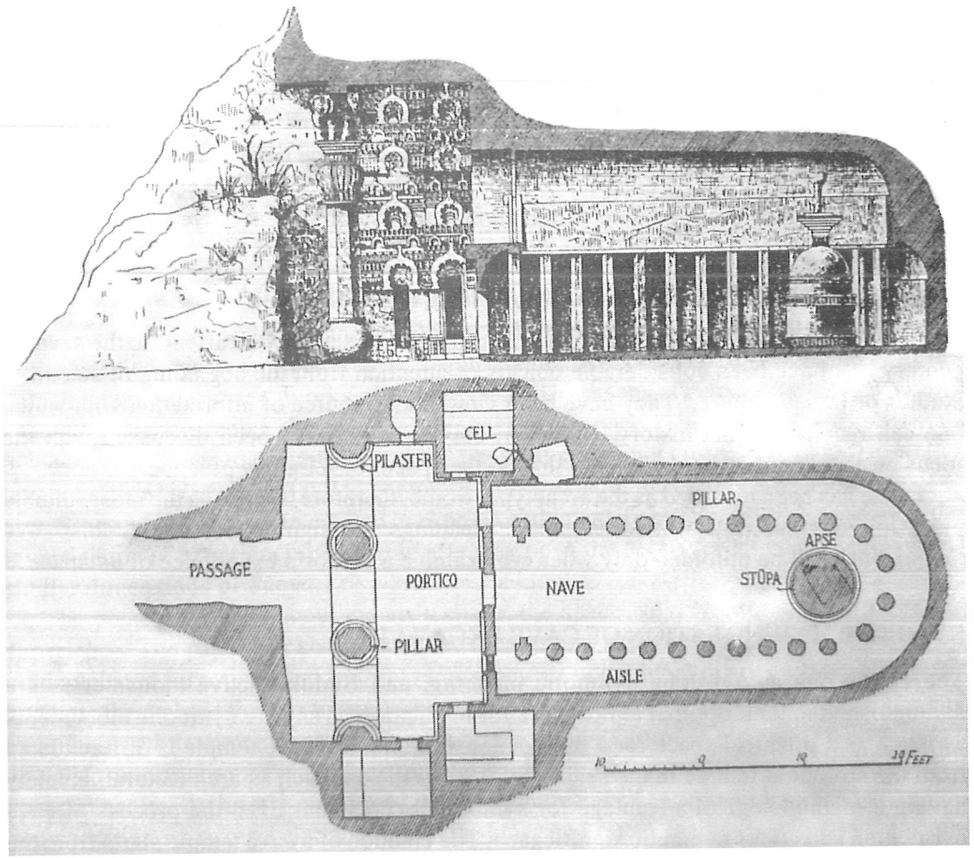


Figure III.3. Apsidal Plan, Bedsa Caityagṛha, second century AD; the drawing from Debala Mitra, 'Buddhist Monuments', after Fergsson and Burgess.

area conforms to the latent potentiality of a cave space. The long axis in front of the *stūpa*, while analogically reflecting the 'path' for enlightenment, actualizes the inwardness of cavity. And the semi-circular space at the rear with domical ceiling turns to be a fluid motor space at the time of circumambulation, and dynamically combines the linear movement with the circular movement of a visitor.

## CHANGES IN LATER PHASE OF BUDDHIST CAVE TEMPLES: INTRINSIC PROBLEM OF FORMS

Our present discussion on *Śūnya* in arts is closely related to our understanding of forms and the non-form. In relation to the innate problem of form, we may pay attention to the changes brought out by the later phase of excavation as is exemplified in the cave complex of Ajanta, Aurangabad and Ellora. In the later phase of Buddhist cave monasteries, the Mahayana idioms such as bodhisattvahood (a being on the way to reach the Buddhahood) and the Buddha's 'Celestial Heaven', exerted a great impact on the architectural form and



sculptural scheme of the monastic complex. Therefore, we see that Buddhist monasteries of the later phase in India adopted a very elaborate design in terms of space organization, sculptures and paintings and gained a monumental quality. For example, the later phase of Ajanta has a Buddha shrine within the monk's dwelling unit (*vihāra*). We find not only in the main *caityagṛha*, but also in *vihāra*, the elaborate decorative scheme that was never employed in the monk's dwelling place till the end of third century AD, but confined to the great monuments like the *stūpas* of Sanchi or Amaravati. The anthropomorphic image of the Buddha became the main theme of sculptures and paintings of the Buddhist cave complex in the later phase. Not only the external façade, but also the interior rock surface was carved with Buddha images in different sizes from tiny to colossal (Fig. III.4). In this

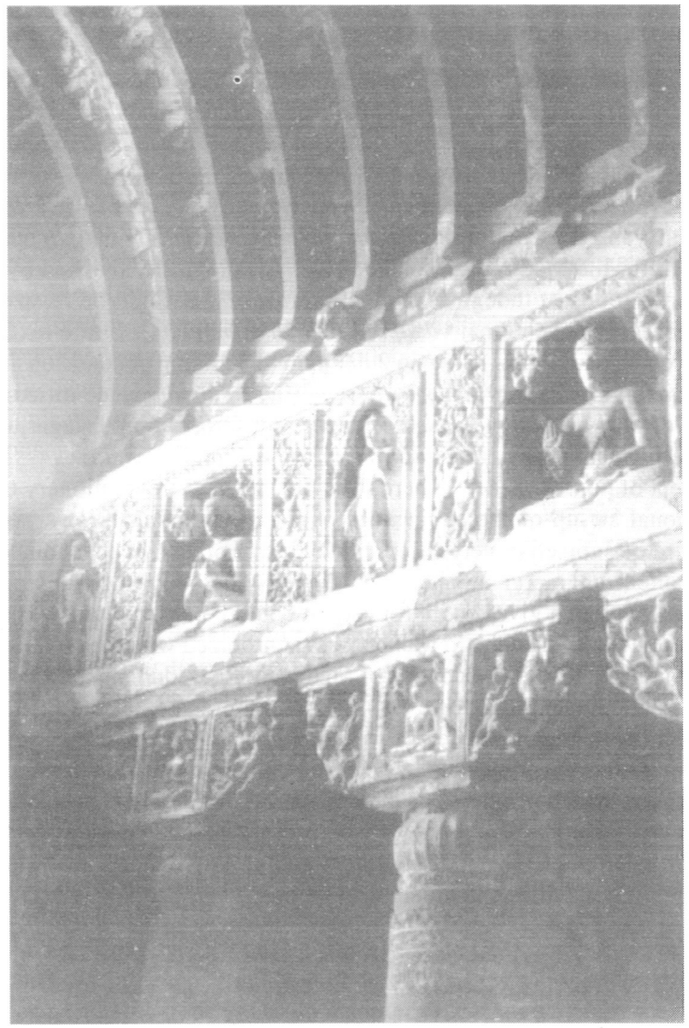

Figure III. 4. Anthropomorphic image of Buddha, interior, Ajanta Cave XVI, Maharashtra.

way, the ritual walk along the circumambulatory path in the *caityagṛha* was replenished with Buddha images, which is clearly different from the pristine and simple ambience of earlier *caityagṛha*. Concerning perceptive forms, the later phase of Buddhist cave monasteries in western India betrays a different perspective from that of the early phase that was conscious of the illusory nature of perceptive forms. The history of Buddhist arts that started with an-iconic representation but eventually developed various iconographic formulae involving manifold colours and forms, appear contradictory to the increasing importance of *Śūnya* in Buddhist philosophy. Then, how can we relate the full-fledged exploration of forms to the philosophy of *Śūnya* that was synchronously fostered within the fold of Mahayana Buddhism?

## *ŚŪNYA* IN BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY

*Śūnya*, as we understand literally, 'Nothingness' or 'Emptiness', was advocated in the early recorded discourses (*nikāyas*) of Buddhism, which emphasize the ephemeral quality of phenomena. Buddhist practice involved the quieting of the mind through meditation and the analysis of the factors that constitute perceived objects, and it was purposed to remove mental or/and emotional disturbances and consequently realize the truth of no-self. [11]

In the Mahayana Buddhist text, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* by Nagarjuna that has been the guidebook for the Mādhyamika School, *Śūnya* is logically reached by destroying all views or formulations of thoughts; in other words, *Śūnya* could be realized by rejecting the interference of conventional *vikalpas* (mental constructs). In the text, he shows the process of 'seeing oneself' as being no other than 'the arising of consciousness depending upon the eye and visible form' (*cakṣur-indriya*, III.7). *Śūnyatā* is identified in the text with the concept of *pratītya-samutpāda* (Interdependent Origination). Nagarjuna's theory of *Śūnya* is a refinement of the early doctrine of no-self (*anātmavāda*).

The concept of non-existence of perceived objects has a revolutionary trait that denies the conventional set-up of the subject/object relationship and throws new light on the illusory nature of subjective perception as well as of objective appearance. The illusory and impermanent character of phenomena opens the scope of transformation in the perceptive world, which gives room for arts. It could be a partial answer to the question why the introduction of Buddhism was often synchronized with the developments of arts.

*Śūnya* explained above in the context of Mādhyamika Buddhism, still retains a negative imprint in our understanding. However, reminding ourselves of the fact that Mahayana Buddhist teachings are epitomized not just by *Śūnya* but by its inseparable relation with *karuṇā* (compassion) will help us to be free from the preconception that sees *Śūnya* as the negative vacuum, which obscure our understanding on its other facets. The proposition that the deepest cognition of emptiness is expressed as compassion well illustrates the inseparability of emptiness and compassion, and clearly denotes that *Śūnya* means the awareness of interrelatedness in all sentient beings.

## *ŚŪNYA* OF PERCEPTIVE FORMS: THE INTRINSIC PROBLEM OF VERBAL AND VISUAL EXPRESSION

There seem to have been no other way for Nagarjuna than identifying *Śūnya* with *pratītya-samutpāda* because the *Śūnya* is encapsulated neither in language nor in any perception.



Nagarjuna's use of logic was to justify *Śūnya*, and the Non-Existence of experienced things was simultaneously to prove that language distorts a true cognition of *Śūnya*. In the context of intrinsic limitation of form, it will be relevant to pay attention to two different positions of the Mādhyamika School about language and words. The Prāsangikas of Mādhyamika School stressed the distorting character of all concepts and logic; language and logic are important tools to show the self-contradictory and distortional character of conceptual formulation. According to them, the awareness of *Śūnya* is the destruction of all views and formulations. On the other hand, the Svātantrikas held that language and logic cannot express the most profound aspects of the highest truth, but some assertions express the truth of *Śūnya* more accurately than others. The accurate statements are subject to conventional and logical rules of language.[12]

The difference in their positions about language and words can be applied to visual expressions in arts. If we replace the term 'language and words' with 'visual form' in the Svātantrika's assertion, we get the following affirmation: 'Some forms express the truth of *Śūnya* more accurately than others.' This could have been the reason why rules and formulae had to be set-up in the following period for making images of Buddhist deities in relation with *Śūnya*. More relevantly here, two different philosophical views about language are comparable to an-iconic and iconic renderings, generally treated as representing the views of Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism respectively, as we have briefly dealt with earlier. The Svātantrikas' viewpoint may philosophically reflect Mahayana Buddhist's meticulous planning and articulation in visual explorations for unfolding the ultimate reality, *Dharma*, while recognizing the distorting characteristics of sense perception. Visual effects created by dynamic relations among forms in the later phase of Buddhist cave monasteries spell out the consonance to *Śūnya* as interdependent origination.

## SPACE OF *KHA*: BUDDHIST CAVE MONASTERIES

### *Light*

While moving within the *caityagṛha*, we observe that the rock-cut figures in the cave space appear and disappear in consonance to light from one moment to the next. Our perception of forms changes in relation to the light. In a cave space, light and visual forms are inseparable, when they are perceived. And a slight change of our viewpoint brings out a great difference in the visual effect. Rock-cut forms are intermingled with light, and they create a peculiar dynamic effect. The intermingling of rock-cut objects with natural light and the constant change of visual effects adds vibrancy to the cave space.

The prominence of light effect in a cave space is especially remarkable when we follow the path of circumambulation in a *caityagṛha* with an apsidal plan. During the circumambulation, we may find the metaphoric significance of our eyes getting accustomed to the darkness, as we proceed through the corridor of rock pillars in the *caitya* hall. Apparently, we get more and more sight out of darkness. When we go through the circular path at the rear, we enter the darkest part in the interior that is shaded by the *stūpa*. At the moment we walk out of the shadowy darkness of the semi-circular path, at the turning point, a strong flash of light strikes the eyes. The eyes are suddenly awakened by light

coming from the sun-window pierced at the front wall of the cave (Fig. III.5). Then, we also see sharp light directly falling on to the dome of the *stūpa*. From this viewpoint, all the rock-cut objects appear shining with light. Our vision is guided by the strong imagery of light, and the rock-cut figures are seen in their ethereal facet. Our sight follows the image of light. When we see the light flowing through the rock-cut forms and the void space, we become in tune with it. A calm observation of changing shade and light stimulates a meditative mood in our mind.

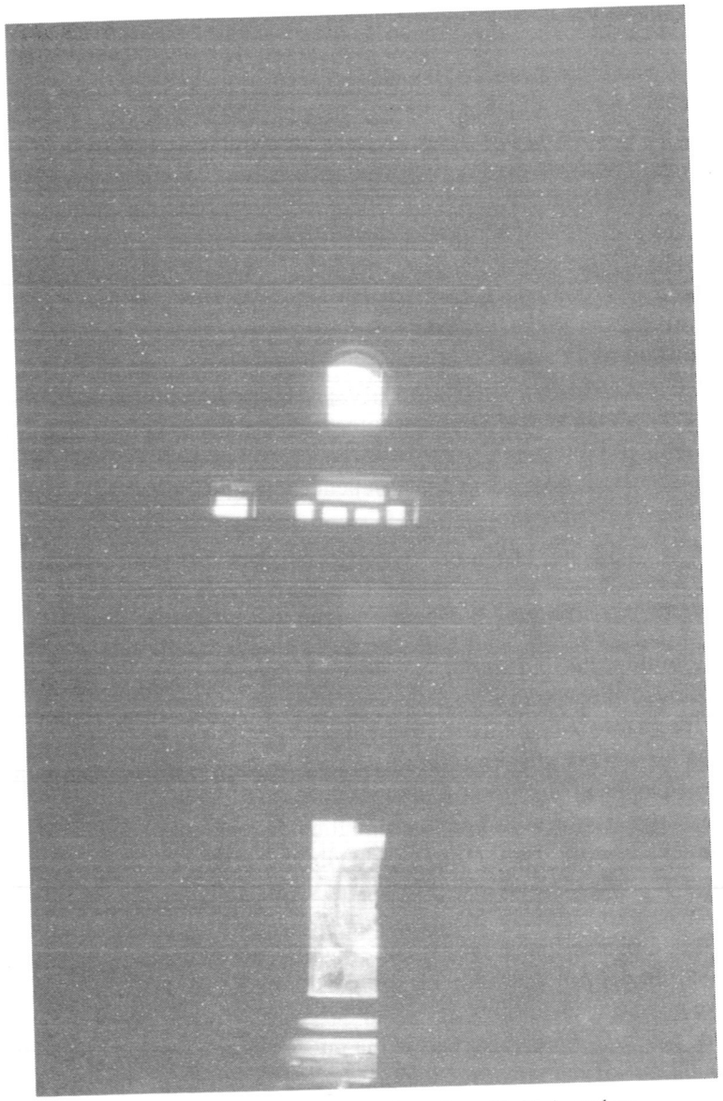

Figure III.5. Sun-Window, interior, Ellora Cave X, Maharashtra.



*Attuned Approach to the Sacred*

The observations of the way how Buddhist cave monasteries in western India developed, especially in their early phase, will throw light on the fact, that architectural developments were mostly concentrated on the additional devices that would lead to a smooth link between the outer open environments and the inner sanctuary. In its architectural maturity as demonstrated by the *caityagṛha* of Bedsa, Karle and Kanheri, the movement of a visitor would be led from the outer zone to the tunnel-like hall, having passed through an entrance passage, an open forecourt and a verandah. The verandah was apparently devised for a visitor to prepare oneself physically and mentally, and go further towards the sacred object inside, which served as a transitional zone between the ordinary space outside and the consciously created space inside. The *caityagṛha* of Karle shows a remarkable feature that is less conspicuous in that of Bedsa; the floor level of the *caitya* hall is raised in relation to the frontal portions of the temple, thus, a visitor's axial movement gradually ascends. This feature is more prominent in the *caityagṛha* of Kanheri (Cave III). Through the gradually ascending level of ground, the sacred path is distinctively marked out, though delicately discernible, through the axis. The later example of *caityagṛha* in Ellora unfolds a more dynamic and articulated design regarding the level of ground.

By means of these articulations, we get gradually close to the sacred object, the *stūpa*. As compared to the development of *abhidharma* tradition in early Buddhism pronouncing that the spiritual path to enlightenment is constituted of structured levels, and one has to make gradual steps following these levels,[13] Buddhist cave monasteries architecturally grew to manifest the idea that the spiritual journey consists of gradual steps towards *dharma* visually represented by *stūpa*. It is particularly reflective when we observe a visitor's moving through *pradakṣiṇāpatha* in the cave space.

The sense of space-articulation increased through the early development of Buddhist cave monasteries in the way a visitor's access to the *stūpa* became smoother and more inspiring. His gradual access to the *stūpa* in the monastic space may correspond to his gradual progress in the spiritual realm.

*Articulation of Space*

Buddhist cave monasteries were developed into an elaborate spatial device; the space articulation and pertinent settings of Buddhist deities were elaborated in order to coordinate a visitor's movements with ritualistic practices within a monastic structure. We discover in the Ellora cave site that the settings of three parts constitute a unit, which may represent three fundamental elements in the spiritual path of Buddhism: *bodhi, karuṇā and prajñā*.[14] The Buddhist monasteries of Ellora, Cave number XI and XII illustrate an architectural attempt to articulate various directional movements within the cave space in the ritualistic context. For instance, their vertical divisions of three levels may be interpreted as dramatic device for attuning the inner experiences of a devotee in resemblance to rituals or meditations. Especially, in Cave number XI, the ritualistic significance of a devotee's ascension through three levels is reassured by his deeper inwardly movements, as we go up from the first level to the second, and from the second level to the third (Fig. III.6a, b, c). The difference in Buddha's *mudrās* through the three levels in this cave is apparently

Figure III.6a. Ellora Cave XI, seventh century AD, Maharashtra: 1st level.

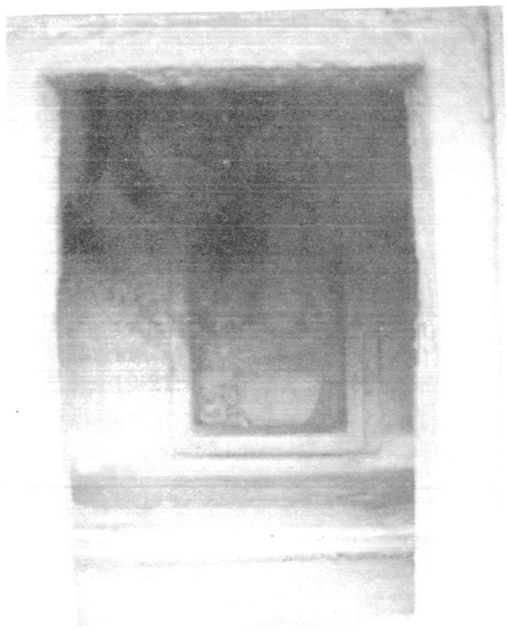

Figure III.6b. Ellora Cave XI, seventh century AD, Maharashtra: 2nd level.



Figure III.6c. Ellora Cave XI, seventh century AD, Maharashtra: 3rd level.

associated with the spiritual progression in rituals and meditations: *dhyānamudrā* in the first level, *bhūmisparśamudrā* in the second level, *dharmacakramudrā* in the third level. The ritualistic implication of the space-organization is enhanced by iconographic schemes of sculptures to unveil a secret map of spiritual practices within the monastic space in Cave number XII. Here, a devotee's intrinsic inwardly orientation is combined with the ascending-descending movements as well as with the linear-circular movements, which increase the dynamics within the architectural space.

## *VYOMAN*: LANDSCAPE PAINTINGS OF MONUMENTAL STYLE

Unfilled canvas of silk in contrast to the mountains, rivers and trees, etc., in the vast spectacle of landscape paintings stretches our sight towards 'the far beyond'. As compared to the poetic expression, the unpainted void space leaves us room for opening our imagination and enjoying the feeling of freedom. Mist in between the foreground and the background, while covering many figures below, carries our sight to the far beyond.

Landscape paintings in East Asia cannot be discussed without referring to their spiritual root in philosophical Taoism. Central concepts of Taoism were pronounced by Lao-tzu (sixth century BC) and Chuang-tzu (fourth century BC) during the Warring States period in China. They were rediscovered and codified by Neo-Taoists of the Southern and Northern Dynasty (AD 220–589). However, their contemporary paintings mainly dealt with the themes of human figures and did not display direct debts to Taoism, while the Neo-Taoist ideals exerted a considerable impact on the political attitude of scholars in the Southern and

Northern Dynasty. The classical criteria of landscape paintings were codified by the painters of the Northern Sunga Dynasty when Neo-Confucianism was established and flourished as the state ideology. However, while the landscape paintings of the Northern Sunga betray the rational attitude of painters and their respect for realistic qualities of paintings in accordance with the Neo-Confucian attitude, their primary quest has held fast to the transcendental ideal of *Tao* (literally the Way), whose philosophical distillation was undertaken in Taoism.

### *Landscape Paintings and Taoism*

Therefore, though we may find the artistic evolution of landscape paintings actually from the Five Dynasties Period (AD 907–60), their core concepts trace further back to the philosophies of Lao-tzu and Chang-tzu. *Tao*, the term for the Ultimate in Taoism, is most often used in association with other important terms, such as *Hsü* (Vacuity; Void), *Wu* (Nothingness; Emptiness), *Kung* (Void) and *Wu-Wei* (No-Action) where we see the corresponding concept of the Sanskrit *Śūnya*.

The development of landscape painting is closely related to the speculation on the spiritual dimension of environmental nature. It was only when the landscape was taken as a main subject of painting, not as a mere background of human figures in the tenth century AD, that Taoist ideals found their place not only in the social dimension of human life but also in art's space. As environmental nature gained attention as the manifestation of the Ultimate, *Tao*, and its spirituality was regarded as the model which human beings had to follow. *Tai Hsü* (Great Void) or *Wu* was understood as the real body of nature and cosmos in the Taoist context. Thus, landscape paintings were the appropriate means through which a scholar-official could realize the *Tao* of nature even in his room, while he was serving his office being away from nature. The Taoist ideal of transcending the mundane is inevitably envisaged in the dualistic concept of nature and man, in spite of its search for *Tao* in the mind. Therefore, landscape paintings were intended to serve as a space where one could be dissolved in the world of *Tao*; having transcended the physicality of nature the viewer would be inspired to freely wander in *Tao*, which is also the world of *Hsuan* (Dark; Deep; Profound; Abstruse).[15]

### Youn *(Far)–Symbolism of* Vyoman

Monumental Style landscape paintings are distinguished in their theme from the Lyrical Style of landscape paintings in Southern Sunga period (Fig. III.2) that had led to another distinctive line of development in the later period. Though the landscape features in both styles as the common subject, the approach to nature and views of landscapes are different. Whereas, the Lyrical Style landscape paintings show main objects of interest, for example a distinctly shaped tree in harmony with the vast space of unfilled void, the Monumental Style presents a landscape of a far distance view in vast scale without focusing on any object (Figs. III.7, III.8, III.9). The distinctive way the landscapes are unfolded in the Monumental Style painting implies that the painter, who is the viewer of the landscape, maintained a far distance and held an objective and disinterested observation of nature,



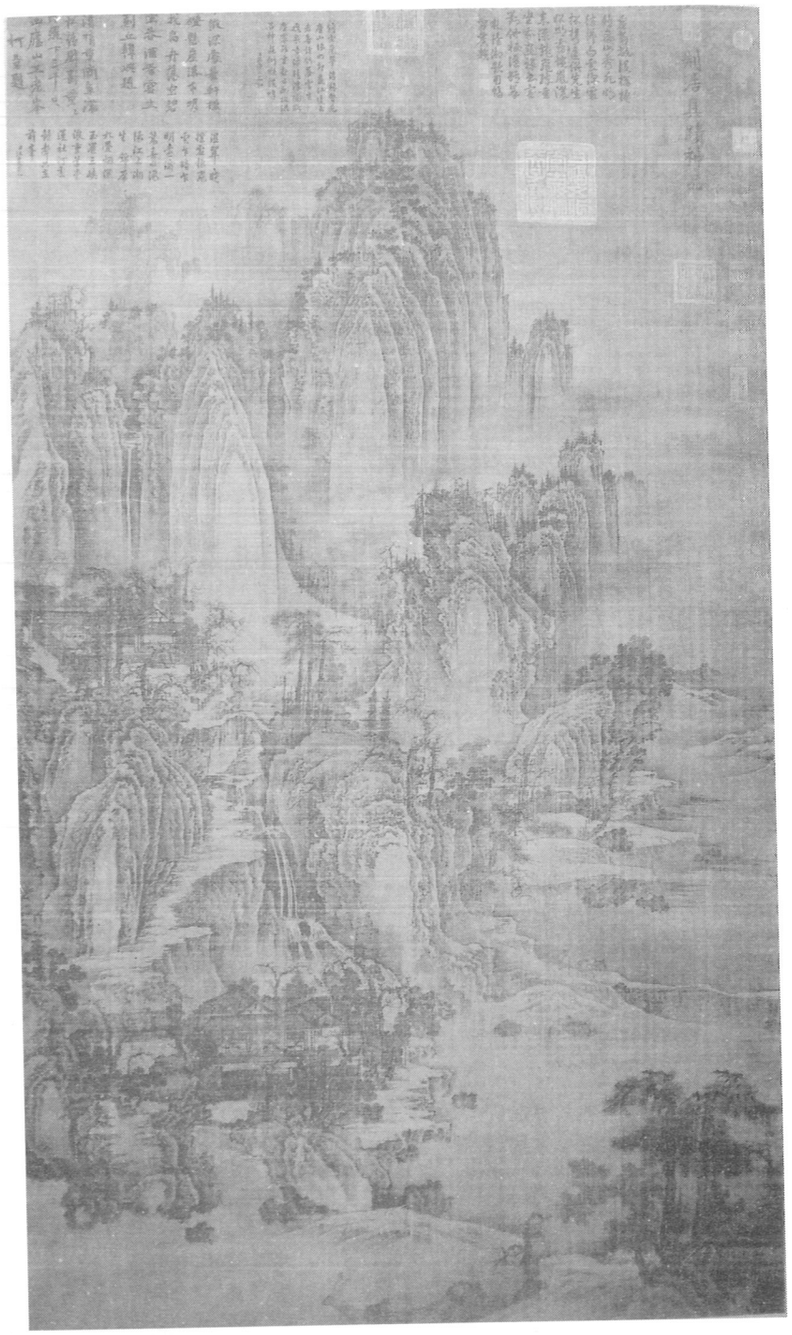

Figure III.7. Jing Hao, *Landscape of Lu Shan*, ink on silk, 185.8 × 106.8 cm, Five Dynasty, Collection of Beijing Palace Museum.

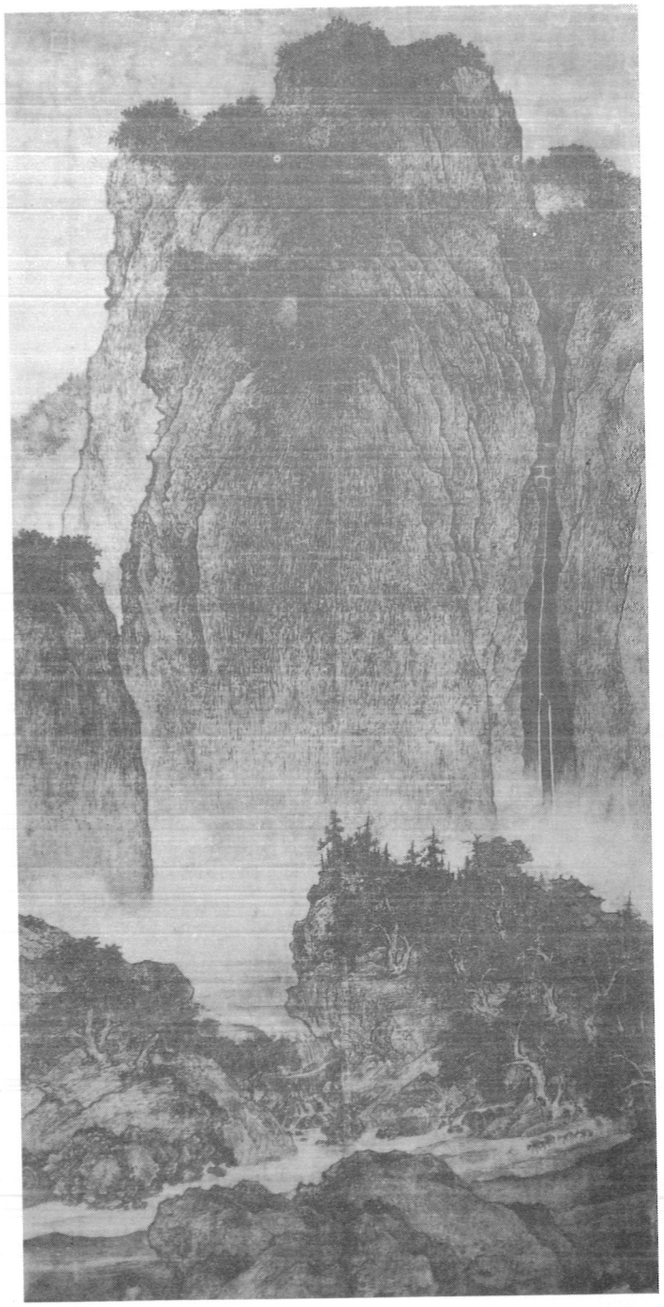

Figure III.8. Fan K'uan, *Travellers on a Mountain Path*, light colour on silk, Northern Sunga Dynasty, Collection of Beijing Palace Museum.



Figure III.9. Guo Xi, *Early Spring*, 158.3 × 108.1 cm, ink and light colour on silk, Northern Sunga Dynasty.

which is epitomized by the term *Youn* (Far). In the case of Monumental Style landscape paintings, far distance (*Youn*) was the necessary condition to represent the main theme, nature as the manifestation of *Tao*, in a sincere and true manner without any emotional attachment (*Youn*) to the object. The vast scaled landscape in a small frame of painting presupposes the empty firmament between the landscape and the viewer, which is conceived in the Sanskrit term *vyoman* in the Indian tradition.

Before the concept of *Youn* was canonized in artistic terms by the Northern Song painter, Guo Xi in his '*Linquan Gaozhi*' (The Message of Forests and Streams),[16] the spiritual implication of the concept *Youn* was denoted early in '*Hua Sanshui Xu*', one of the earliest canons of landscape paintings of China: '. . . considering the difference between the size of the huge Kulun mountains and that of my small pupil of the eye, I cannot look at whole mountains in close distance. But the whole mountains can be seen from a far distance. When we leave a distance further and further from an object, it becomes smaller in appearance. If I stretch the white silk and paint the landscape located far away, huge figures like Kulun mountains can be contained in a small frame of silk . . .'.[17]

## Wu *(Nothingness; Emptiness) and* Wu-Wei *(No-Action)*

The conceptual counterpart of *Śūnya* can be found in the Taoist concepts of *Hsü*, *Wu* and *Kung*. Here, we will first look into the meanings of *Wu* in the Taoist context and go further to see how the concept is relevant to arts under the present discussion.

*Wu* in Taoism is specified with the positive characteristics of no spatial restriction, which means, without any form in their negative side. The following quotation from Wang-Pi's '*Lao-tzu Zhî-Lüè*' (Summary of Lao-tzu) testifies the understanding of *Wu* as the primeval source of everything in Taoist context: [18]

> The creation of things and the achievement of merit come from the Formless through the Nameless. The Formless and Nameless, thus, is the ultimate of everything. It is neither warm, nor cold. It is neither the 'A' musical scale nor the 'B'. It is not possibly heard though we listen. It is not possibly seen though we look. It is not possibly known though we hold. There is no taste of it though we taste. Therefore, 'taking forms' is none other than 'formless'; 'taking sounds' is none other than 'soundless'. . . . Thus, it can become the ultimate end of everything. There is nothing that is not penetrated and encompassed by it.[19]

*Wu* is not the non-existence as opposed to existence, nor 'shapeless' as opposed to 'shaped', but it is the source of everything, which penetrates through all phenomenal forms and concepts.

When *Wu* is realized in the realm of phenomena, the word *Wu-Wei* is employed to epitomize how things move. Philosophical bases and meanings of *Wu-Wei* are versed in Lao-tzu's *Tao-te Ching*, Ch. II:

> Under heaven all can see beauty as beauty only because there is ugliness.
> All can know the good as good only because there is evil.
> Therefore having and not having arise together.
> Difficult and easy complement each other.
> Long and short contrast each other;
> High and low rest upon each other;



> Voice and sound harmonize each other;
> Front and back follow one another.
> Therefore the sage goes about doing nothing, teaching no-talking.
> The ten thousand things rise and fall without cease,
> Creating, yet not possessing,
> Working, yet not taking credit.
> Work is done, then forgotten.
> Therefore it lasts forever.[20]

As we can seee from the above verses and also from the fact that the term is most often used as an adjective for nature, *Wu-Wei* is the principle of actions that results in the great harmony in nature. Here is the point where we can find the relation of concept of *Wu* to arts. What we see here in the philosophy of *Wu-Wei* is the revelation of *Śūnya* as a working principle in the creative process of arts. *Wu-Wei* held the important position in arts, and the attitude of *Wu-Wei* has been nurtured as the principle of great harmony in arts of East Asia. Arts of East Asia place the highest esteem not to a work with dexterity of shaping figures or with overflowing energy of brushworks, but to a work with no trace of human hands, just revealing the way nature moves. A work exhibiting any obsession with skillful techniques was regarded low, and the display of extreme energy was a sign of the painter's vulgarity. The paradoxical aim at 'artless art' or 'technique of no-technique' naturally leaves room for an artist's spontaneity, and recognizes the indefinite and autonomous process of arts.

A narrative in '*Chuang-Tzu*' explicitly demonstrates the *Wu-Wei* as the way of action by following which one can realize *Tao*. The following narrative about the cook Ting represents 'Śūnya' or *Wu* in its association with the spirit of arts on the one hand and the craft of art on the other. Having impressed the Lord Wen-hui with the skill of butchering an ox that reached the level of music and dance, the cook explains the process of his mastery: 'When I first began cutting up oxen, all I could see was the ox itself. After three years I no longer saw the whole ox. And now, I go at it by spirit and don't look with my eyes. Perception and understanding have come to a stop and the spirit moves where it wants.'

The secret of his mastery of the arts lies in his transcending of the sensory relationship between the object and the subject and acting in the state of *Wu*.

His next statement holds an important clue to understand how *Wu-Wei* is related to *Hsü* (Void):

> I go along with the natural makeup (of anatomy), strike in the big hollows, . . . follow things as they are . . . I've cut up thousands of oxen with it, and yet the blade is as good as though it had just come from the grindstone. There are spaces between the joints, and the blade of the knife has really no thickness. If you insert what has no thickness into such spaces, then there's plenty of room—more than enough for the blade to play about it. . . . [21]

## REQUISITE FACTORS FOR FORMAL EXPRESSIONS OF *HSÜ*

The above examination of the concepts *Wu* and *Wu-Wei* that are comparable to the Sanskrit term *Śūnya* entails a question: Why did those concepts, though traced far back in time,

have to wait till the tenth century AD for their artistic manifestations? The question may be approached from the perspective of intrinsic problems of perceptive forms.

Even when the Neo-Taoist movement prevailed from the third century AD, the core concepts of Taoism were bound to its salient trait of escapism; 'transcendence' meant far away from the mundane matters. The quest for *Tao* in nature and the ideal of transcendence were rather literal, therefore, could not be applied to the secular life of scholar-officers though they would admire transcendental ideals in their mind. The Taoist view, if it is taken literally, certainly contains a negative angle about our senses and pleasure-seeking in secular life, and recommends us to transcend them.[22] The apparent distinction of transcendental *Tao* from daily mundane matters had to be mended if *Tao* was to be expressed in visual forms. In this regard, we have the reference to a personage who practised the ideal of transcendence not in secluded mountains, but through his profession of painting: Chong Bing (AD 375–443), who wrote one of the earliest theories of landscape paintings.[23] He set the verifiable ground for landscape paintings in his writing *'Hua Shanshui xu'* (Introduction to Painting Landscape) and explained how painting landscape is regarded as the realization of *Tao*. We read in *Hua Shanshui xu*: 'Nature, though retaining the material substances, is inclined to the world of spirit. . . . Spirit, being originally baseless and formless (*Wu*), not only permeates through objects of forms but also feels them. That is the reason why it can also enter a landscape painting. . . .'

Here, the spirit signifies another word of *Hsü* or *Wu* which suggests *Tao*. We see in Chong Bing's theory that *Wu* or *Hsü* is the very ground where the manifold forms are combined with the Ultimate. Therefore, painting landscape attained the philosophical and artistic significance through the concept *Hsü* and *Wu*, bridging the transcendental *Tao* and material forms.

In another way, the question about the temporal gap between the root of concepts and their expressions shown in the development of landscape painting can be approached in reference to the collective effort of scholar-officials under the evolving movement of Neo-Confucianism in the tenth century AD. During the Northern Sunga Period, Neo-Confucian scholar-officials attempted to understand the Universal Principle *Li* in the context of secular life. The Neo-Confucianists made efforts to analyse how things move, having focused their discussion on the concept of *Li* (Principle) and *Chi* (Vital Energy). Therefore, they presented a cosmogonical picture that was more intricately constructed than Taoist *Wu-Wei*. The efforts made by the mainstream of Neo-Confucianists called 'Chung-Chu School', were meant for restoring the Confucian ethics to the Universal Principle, *Li*, and proving that ethics was the means for the ordinary people to realize *Li* in practical life. While nature gained more spiritual import in the conceptual settings of the Chung-Chu School, Chu Hsi, who systematized Neo-Confucian thoughts, distinguished the principle of Heaven (*Tien*) from the heart (*Xīn*) of human beings; nature reveals the principle of Heaven which is none other than 'Tao', and human mind (*Xīn*) can follow the example of nature in order to realize *Tao*. The search for *Tao* in the environmental nature necessarily involved an apparent separation between the realm of nature and that of human beings, between the object and the subject. However, the external search of the Ultimate Principle may well have accelerated active production of landscape paintings so that the scholar-officials could enjoy the world of '*Tao* in nature' without resigning their office.



Some of the important characteristics of the Monumental Style landscape paintings, especially in the matter of spatial organization, can be attributed to their Neo-Confucian association. We find that their dynamic approach to the formless Ultimate is well represented in the abstraction of landscapes, and that the criteria of their abstraction are theoretically based on the philosophy of Neo-Confucianism, particularly about the relationship between *Li* and *Chi*. Logical renderings of details, while pursuing landscape is directed towards the transcendental ideal, particularly conforming to the rational attitude of Neo-Confucianists towards nature. By artistic means such as complex details and careful organization of space, Monumental Style landscape paintings facilitate orderly approach to the vast space, *Vyoman*.

## SPACE OF *VYOMAN*: MONUMENTAL STYLE LANDSCAPE PAINTINGS

### *Gradation of Ink: Darkness and Hsuán*

As landscape painting developed to attain a certain format, ink came to be preferred to colours. It is not surprising if we consider the conceptual background of landscape painting centered on *Wu*,—'No-Colour' in relation to *Tao*. Therefore, in the formulae of the medium, ink represented the world of *Wu*. Various techniques in ink could replace the use of colours in the painting as if demonstrating that all the forms and colours return to the world of *Wu*. The Neo-Confucian idea of One Principle penetrating all the phenomenal principles could be also suitably represented by ink.

Ink was preferred for landscape painting also because it was conducive to express rhythms and moods (emotion) of landscapes which constantly change according to the climate and condition. A particular mood or rhythm of the Vital Spirit (*Chi*) could be appropriately reflected in a particular technique. The medium of ink conforms to the Taoist retrieval of forms to the formless, of sounds to the soundless. Especially, the concept of *Hsuán* (Dark, Profound), which is one of the revelations of *Tao*, could be represented best by dark ink, and the profundity of *Tao* could have the form by means of various gradations of ink, since ink was treated as 'the colour of *Hsuan*'. Zhäng Yàn Youn, an art historian and theorist of the Tang Period elucidated the spirituality and potentiality of ink in his writing:

> All the forms evolve as the *Chi* of *yin* and *yang* moves. Profound changes continue soundlessly, only the craft of the Spirit is used. Green grassland does not need colouring of green. Clouds, snow, stormy wind is white without white colouring. . . . Like this, five colours look bright and exquisite just by means of colourless ink. . . . If the mind is attached to five colours, the real nature of an object is distorted.[24]

### *San-Youn Fâ (Law of Three Far-View): Space Organization for Containing* Vyoman *in Painting Space*

*Youn* in the metaphysical sense indicates the state that Tao-seekers tried to reach. We see that the metaphysical *Youn* was formulated into an artistically applicable concept through his *San-Youn Fâ* (Law of Three Far-View) in Guo Xi's *'Linquan Gaozhi'*. Guo Xi (AD

1020 to 1090) introduces *San-Youn Fâ* in the context of how *Wu* is manifested in manifold forms in nature and how *Wu* could be revealed in the landscape painting as follows.

> . . . There are three types of viewpoints in painting the mountains; the one from the foot of the mountain looking up the top of the mountain is called '*Gāo Youn*' (High Far-View); another from the front of the mountain looking into the back (behind) of the mountain is called '*Shēn Youn*' (Deep Far-View); the other from a mountain close by looking at the mountain far away is called '*Ping Youn*' (Horizontal Far-View).[25]

Then, he describes their corresponding colour (or mood) representations.

*Youn* in Guo Xi's theory steadfastly retains its fundamental implication of a spiritual state. In his *San-Youn Fâ*, *Youn* is an alternative term of *Wu*, therefore the manifold forms are the revelation of *Youn* and take equal position in nature. Diverse forms in landscape could be merged into the world of *Wu* when they are viewed in a far distance from down to up, from up to down and from close to far. In Monumental Style landscape paintings, the *San-Youn Fâ* (Law of Three Far-View) proves to be a compositional solution so as to contain the vast open space in the limited painting space. As a result, a small vertical format of silk turns to a space so vast that the viewer of the painting, once absorbed, can move in several directions, following the painter's view of nature.

Here, one of Guo Xi's paintings, 'Early Spring', will exemplify how his theory of *San-Youn Fâ* serves as a solution for the expression of *vyoman* in painting (Fig. III.9). In appearance, the vertical format of silk is divided into three parts: the foreground, middle ground and background. It is observed that each far-view that is structured in *San-Youn Fâ* was applied to each of three units: 'Deep Far-View' to the foreground, 'Horizontal Far-View' to the middle ground and 'High Far-View' to the background.

As the scroll of painting is unfolded, the viewer of the painting starts his appreciation from the low portion of the painting, that is, the foreground of the painting. Here, he is virtually positioned to view the landscape from the front of the mountain to far deep down (*Shēn Youn*). While his eyes follow the realistically rendered path among trees, rocks and streams in the foreground, he appreciates detailed delineations of nature and would feel as if he actually walks along the path in landscape (Fig. III.10). Further up in the painting, he sees the unfilled space of mist represented as if hiding all the details below. When his sight reaches the middle ground of mist, he has the view of horizontal far, that is, from the close mountain to the mountain in far distance (*Ping Youn*). Having passed the empty space of mist in the middle ground, he sees the high mountains, as if he is looking up from the foot of the mountain to the top (*Gāo Youn*) (Fig. III.11).

As the format of the scroll itself indicates, the viewer of the painting actively moves his subtle eyes. As much as his sight moves in response to the details of landscape, the viewer's subtle position is not static but mobile. The process the viewer goes through during appreciation is particularly remarkable in that while he, in his imagination, moves from the close distance to the far distance, his walk leads him to the lofty mountains, and finally brings him close to them. The lofty mountain placed in the centre of the background is compared to a king in the text, and as its imposing form tells us, it symbolizes the Highest in nature. Therefore, the appreciation of landscape paintings finds a spiritual context where a viewer's involvement in landscape means his approach to the Highest in virtual space.



Figure III.10. Detail of Guo Xi's *Early Spring*: foreground of the painting.

*Complex Details: Ching Hao's* 'Bifa Ji'

The viewer's virtual involvement in his vivid experience through the landscape in the Monumental Style paintings are enhanced by naturalistic renderings of nature in the painting. Especially as the path is to be made among diverse objects in the painting on the basis of logical observation of nature; the path has to flow without any abrupt interference in the painting. Complex details are to be articulated as they are observed in nature, especially for the foreground (Fig. III.10). For instance, the pine tree is to be drawn on the basis of actual observation, such as that 'the pine tree has a flexible nature, though never bent. It is inclined to grow straight from the sapling stage and does not want to be placed at a low level.'[26]

The important point to keep in mind is that complex details in the painting do not inspire the viewer unless the vital spirit *Chi* is manifested with natural flow in the painting. The *Bifa Ji* (A Note on the Art of Brush) written by Ching Hao, a Confucian scholar and also painter, in the beginning of tenth century AD provides us with the theoretical reflection of spirituality that is implied in the logical delineations and complex details of nature in landscape paintings. The logical rendering based on the observation of nature in the text does not mean the delineation of static shape but the representation of inborn nature of an

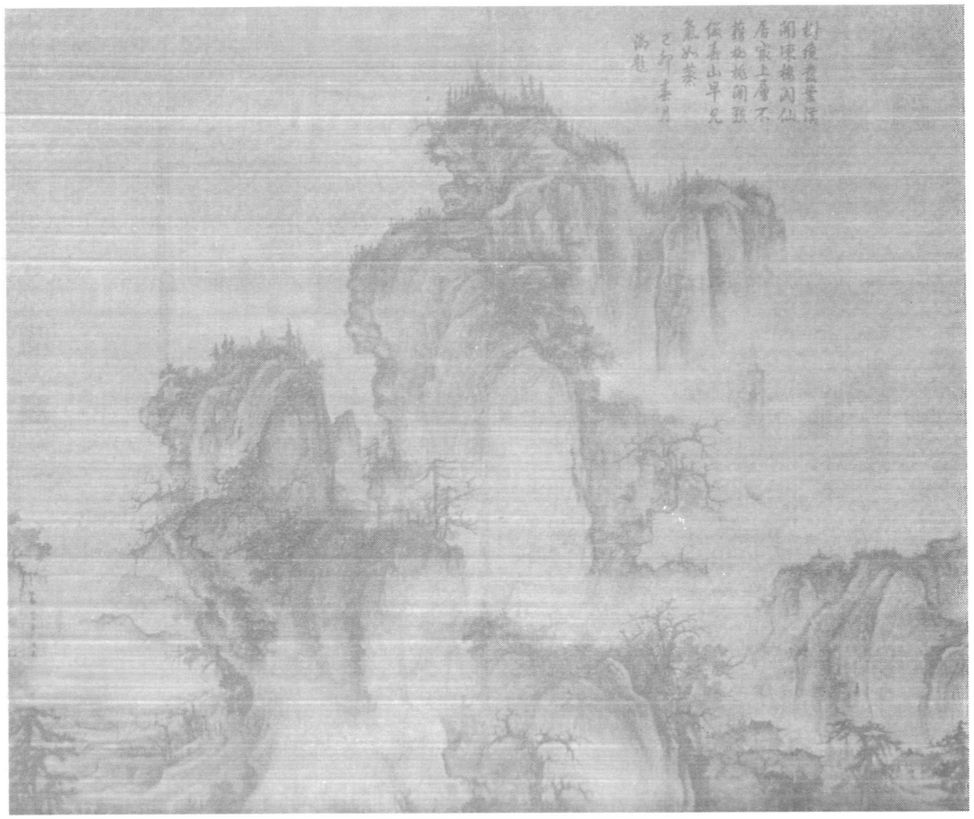

Figure III.11. Detail of Guo Xi's *Early Spring*: background of the painting.

object, *Hsing* (comparable to the Sanskrit term *svabhāva*). The spiritual dimension of logical renderings in paintings is clearly emphasized in the text: 'If you like to paint the landscape, you should be clear about the origin of material forms. Trees grow as per their *Hsing* (Original Nature). . . . Forms of landscape change according to climate and conditions. . . . Only after knowing the principle of change, you should learn the art of brush. . .'.[27]

The concluding remarks of the text combine the Taoist *Wu-Wei* with various techniques of brush, and tries to transcend the physicality of the medium: 'You can paint the true landscape only when you forget (transcend) the technique of brush and ink.' In the emphasis on representing the inborn nature of an object, *Hsing*, by delineating it, we read the implication of the abstraction as a fundamental process of painting.

## *KHA* AND *VYOMAN*: DYNAMIC *ŚŪNYA*

As the above examination has revealed, the spatial formulae of the Monumental Style landscape paintings were established with the criterion of the viewer's approach to the Ultimate. The crucial device in space articulation was to create the believable path in the



landscape so that the viewer could walk through in his imagination. The vast space contained in their vertical format was the result of the abstraction based on what is observed in nature. The phenomenal changes of an object observed for a considerable period of time had to be integrated to its original nature (*Hsing*), which serves as the principle of its changes along time. And the abstraction of forms had the goal of 'reaching far', as is spiritually elaborated in the concept of *Youn*.

The earlier examination of Buddhist cave monasteries of western India can be summarized as follows: that the cavity, having its original concept of 'Primeval Space', was shaped into a dynamic space by means of religious spiritualization and artistic vitalization. A cavity in the matrix of rock has been a metaphoric image of the inner heart of human beings. Arts involved in Buddhist cave monasteries successfully invoke the gradual movement toward the inner cavity, *Kha*. Similar to what we have observed in landscape paintings of Monumental Style, the cave space attained a dynamic character by the articulation of the axial path, which leads the visitor smoothly to the Ultimate.

The above examinations reveal that the profound meanings of void space of *Śūnya* are realized by a visitor or a viewer who is transferred to the subtler level of *Śūnya*. It is the dynamic interrelation of visual constituents in the architecture or the painting, inclusive of void space, that guides him to the imaginative space beyond the physical level, and it is through the internalizing process of space-experience that transforms our conception of *Śūnya* from the physical to the trans-physical. What is crucial for our understanding of *Śūnya* in its trans-physical dimension is to recognize the role of the vital principle in the form of dynamic relations created by visual forms. Thus, we are now led to the question of the relationship between the vital principle and *Śūnya*.

## ŚŪNYA AND VITAL PRINCIPLE IN REFERENCE TO PHILOSOPHICAL SPECULATIONS

*Śūnya*, or its equivalent term, *Wu*, has been viewed as the primary source of manifold forms in many traditions. Philosophical speculations on this topic referred by different traditions will help us in analysing their relationship in the aesthetic experience.

### *Vijñānavādins of Buddhist Tradition*

While the Buddhists' basic position is represented in their view on all phenomena as *Śūnya* without self-subsisting reality, the Vijñānavāda School of Buddhism advocates the ultimate reality of *Ālayavijñāna* (the deepest consciousness; the eighth consciousness). Though Vijñānavādins envisaged phenomena as *Śūnya* which are constructed by the mind, they do not equate *Śūnya* with phenomena, but with non-duality of being and non-being in phenomena. *Ālayavijñāna* is the ontological basis from which things originate in their inter-dependency (*pratītya-samutpāda*). Thus, it is identified with *tathāgatagarbha*, and equated with *Śūnya*.

In his *Madhyānta Vibhanga* Asanga (third century AD) says: 'All living beings have the capacity to pervasively construct what is not there (*abhūta-parikalpa*).'[28] In Asanga's *Guhyasamāja-tantra*, *Śūnya* is viewed as the active principle of creation; when the *Bodhicitta*

mingles with *Śūnya*, the mind is filled with innumerable visions and scenes.[29] In the Vijñānavādin's view, the world of multiplicity is the vast expression of *Śūnya*, which was also propagated in the Hwayen School of Buddhism in China. They emphasize that the true reality is neither *Śūnya* nor non-*Śūnya*. The ultimate reality *tathāgatagarbha* is manifested in forms as well as the formless. True *Śūnya* is realized through elimination of the dualistic fabrication of phenomena in this set up.

Here, we see that *tathāgatagarbha* is the term that indicates 'the source' of all creations and specifies the creative dimension of *Śūnya*. Recognizing the creative dimension of *Śūnya* entails the disillusionment of the dualistic settings of phenomena, and therefore, leads to the conclusion of non-dualism.

### *Non-dualistic Śaiva tradition of Kashmir*

The non-dualistic Śaiva tradition of Kashmir specifies the vacant nature of *Śūnya* as *Kha* and its boundless nature as *Vyoman*. And, in their specific terminology, *Śūnya* is the passive void, and its dynamic aspect is termed as *Anākhya* (Unspeakable).[30]

In the meditation practices of this tradition, the process of concentrating on *Śūnya* (or *Madhya*) is understood to be based on *Śakti* (Dynamic Principle; the second *ābhāsa* [manifestation] of the Absolute in its cosmological vision). And, the meditations which involve *Śūnya* are understood as the means through *Śakti* (*śāktopāya*) in the text *Vijñāna Bhairava*. In *Vijñāna Bhairava*, we encounter expressions that reveal the co-relation of *Śūnya* with *Śakti*, such as 'by means of the supreme energy of the void (*śūnyayā parayā śaktyā*), one attains the state of void (*Śūnya*)' in the *Dhāraṇā* 39; 'by becoming the void due to the power of the void, one will reach the state of pure Void' in the *Dhāraṇā* 40; 'real oblation (*homa*) consists in offering all the elements, the senses and sense objects along with the mind into the fire (*śakti*) of the great abode of the void (*mahā-śūnyālaya*)' in the *Dhāraṇā* 149.[31]

### *Taoist Tradition*

Taoist concepts and practices are centred on 'Mediating on One (*Shon – i*).[32] Here, One is identified with *Tao* and also with *Hsü* or *Wu*. At the same time, 'One' is Cosmos, Mother, Matrix and Primordial Breath (the Source of Vital Spirit). This simultaneity implies that *Hsü* or *Wu* coincides with the source of creation, therefore, beings come from non-being, plenitude from nothingness.[33] The following verses of Lao-tzu (Ch. 11) epitomize the Taoist's equation of *Hsü*, *Chi*, and *Yong* (Usefulness):

> Thirty spokes share the wheel's hub.
> It is the centre hole that makes it useful.
> Shape clay into a vessel;
> It is the space within that makes it useful.

The metaphor of the empty hole envisaged in the above verse reminds us of the original Sanskrit term *Kha*. It is the hole of the nave in the wheel that makes the wheel move. The wheel represents the movement.[34] Void in the text of Lao-tzu is the essential requisite for the vital principle to make things move. Without *Hsü*, there cannot come movement. It is



the hole that brings all spokes together to work, and the hole lays the conditional basis for harmony, which is again the basis for the usefulness of a thing. The profit of things (phenomenal existence) is based on the *Yong* of *Wu*, the usefulness of nothingness.

*Tao*, the primary ideal of Taoism, is suggested by *Hsü* or *Wu* on one hand and by the Principle of Creation on the other hand. The relationship between Void and Vital Principle is implied in the logic of Taoism as we read in Lao-tzu (Ch. 4): 'The Tao is an empty vessel, it is used, but never filled. Oh unfathomable source of ten thousand things! . . .'.[35] In the Taoist way of thinking, *Hsü* or *Wu* is the preliminary condition for the movement and function. The terms of *Wu* (Emptiness), *Wu-Wei* (No-action), *Chi* (Vital Principle) and *Yong* (Usefulness) are categorically inseparable in Taoist tradition.

### *Neo-Confucianism*

Neo-Confucianism postulates the organic relationship between the One and the many: *Li* (Principle) is One, but its manifestations are many; all specific principles are nothing but One, the Universal Principle. There, *Li* is the unchanging 'Principle', and *Chi*, the individuating principle results in the many. Because the many are ultimately the One and the One is differentiated in many, *Li* and *Chi* cannot be explained without each other. *Chi* is revealed as two opposite ways, *yin* and *yang*. *Chi* is the source of creation and in its original state *Tai Hsü* (Great Void). The *Chi* of cosmos is revealed in the *Hsing* of each object in nature. *Hsing* (original nature of an object) explained as the essence of objects in the text *Bifa Ji*, is a concretized concept of *Chi*.

One of the founder's of Neo-Confucianism in the Northern Sunga Period, named Chang-Tsai (AD 1020–77), dealt with *Chi* as the main theme of his book *Cheng-meng* (Correcting Youthful Ignorance). In this philosophy, *Chi* is identified with the Great Ultimate. In its original substance of being formless, *Chi* is called *Tai-Hsü* (Great Vacuity), and in its operation or function it is called *Tai-Ho* (Great Harmony). Therefore, Great Vacuity and Great Harmony are fundamentally one.[36] He wrote in the same text: 'In the unity of the Great Vacuity and Chi, there is the nature (*Hsing*) of man and things.'

## RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DYNAMIC PRINCIPLE AND *ŚŪNYA* IN ARTS' SPACE

### *Transformation of Arts' Space*

The articulation and the order of visual settings in Buddhist cave monasteries serve their purpose in leading a visitor smoothly through the axial path to the innermost sanctum. Physical space, sculptures and paintings, all the elements of forms merge into the dynamic flow in the symphony of primeval darkness and penetrating light in cavity. The *Śūnya* of cavity is filled with dynamic forces in a subtler level of space. The fluid dynamics, reflecting the Buddhist affirmation of interdependent relationship, transfer the space of cavity from the physical to the trans-physical plane.

In landscape paintings of the Monumental Style, we also observe that the two-dimensional painting space overcomes the physicality of space by the artist's space

composition and harmonization. Channelling the path within the landscape was essential in order for *Chi* of cosmos to flow through the painting space, as is conceived in *Hua Sanshui Xu*. Details and distinctive descriptions of trees, rocks, streams, etc., were important because the landscape in the painting should look as if it is a place where the viewer could actually walk through. Here, what is important to observe is that the artist requires the ability of one-pointedness to delineate physical details in harmony with one another without looking dull or dry; the artist has to lose the self and follow the way the vital principle leads him in the state of *Wu-Wei*. The One point cannot but be described as *Wu*. Only by following the spontaneous flow of *Chi* can the artist project *Wu* through details of objects.

### *Experiencing* 'Vyoman *in* Kha' *and* 'Kha *in* Vyoman'*: Aesthetic Experience*

However, it is the active involvement of a viewer that makes the painting space alive and organic, when the painting is placed in an objective state. As the scroll is unfolded and the viewer starts appreciating the details of nature in the painting, his sight is absorbed from the foreground to the background. Once the viewer is involved in nature rendered in the painting, he is led to approach from the landscape in the close distance to the lofty mountains in the far distance, which means he travels, in the imaginative space, into nature deeper and deeper. Therefore, his experience of space does not remain in its vastness, but he experiences the depth of boundless space when his absorption in nature brings him right at the foot of the lofty mountains, the symbol of the Highest.

Similarly, in the case of Buddhist cave monasteries, it is the dynamic transformation of a visitor's perception that changes the concept of cave space. A devotee visiting a Buddhist cave monastery would know the sequence of rituals, or meaningful actions in response to the sacredness of the monastery. A dynamic correspondence is established by the inter-relation between space and the person moving through it.[37] The visual orchestration of forms surrounds and intervenes the darkness of the cavity and light endows the gross rock-cut forms with an ethereal quality. When the cavity becomes filled up with life forces brought by the dynamic interrelation of forms and a viewer, the frozen rock material melts and the physical emptiness, *Kha*, transforms to expand boundlessly. Physical cavity is, thus, transformed into the transcendental space during the aesthetic absorption. The aesthetic experience channelled by the dynamic flow of forms activates biological flows of energy in our physical and psychological presence to construct the metaphorical space of heart so as to contain the boundless space, *Vyoman*.

### *Transformation from the Physical to the Trans-physical in Aesthetic Experience*

Aesthetic experience of *Śūnya* starting from the physical level ushers us to profound meanings of *Śūnya*. Aesthetic experience crucially depends on our ability to overcome the material sensory data and transcends the material category of forms. However, the aesthetic experience, in its inseparable relation to our sense experience, differs from rigorous spiritual practices forsaking the validity of our senses. In aesthetic transitions, our sense perceptions and impressions are absorbed by turning outer stimuli to inner forces. In this context,



Abhinavagupta, in his *Parātrīśikā Vīvaraṇa*, provides us with a precise description of how the materials in our sense experiences transform into energy:

> Whatever is taken in, whether in the form of food or perception (e.g., sound, visual awareness of form, savour, contact, etc.) is converted first in the central channel in the form of *ojas* (vital energy); then this *ojas* is converted into seminal energy (*vīrya*) which permeates the whole body. All reproductive and creative functions are performed by this energy. Whether it is the enjoyment of good food, beautiful scenery, sweet music, entrancing poem, the embrace of a dear one, everywhere it is this energy that is at play. It is the representative of the divine energy (*kheçarī*) on the physical plane.[38]

Only when our faculties and materials of sense are internalized and absorbed, we attain aesthetic *bhoga*. Here, the internalization does not mean the static emotional response, but indicates the dynamic transformation of materials to subtler energies within. By means of turning the gross materials into subtler energies, the viewer transcends the physical dimension of space and enters the depth of boundless space and the boundlessness of enclosed cavity.

One of the most often quoted narratives from Chang-tzu in the context of Taoist *Wu*, also implicitly signifies the sensual experience as the crucial element for identifying the subject with objects, which is regarded as fundamental in aesthetic experience:

> Once Chuang-Chou dreamt he was a butterfly, a butterfly flitting and fluttering around, happy with himself and doing as he pleased. He didn't know he was Chuang-Chou. Suddenly he woke up and there he was, solid and unmistakable Chuang-Chou. But, he did not know if he was Chang-Chou who dreamt he was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming he was Chang-Chou. Between Chang-Chou and a butterfly there must be *some* distinction! This is called the 'Transformation of Things'.[39]

Chang-Chou could have the experience of 'I being a butterfly' while flitting and fluttering around being a butterfly, by having the sensual experiences which the butterfly had. Here, *Wu* is realized in the unreality of the division between the object and the subject, and between dream and reality, in other words, in the non-duality. The insight that the distinction is none other than the transformation, implies that the dynamic principle is the adjoining principle between *Wu* and manifold forms. In the whole plot of the narrative, the vital principle is comprehended as the cause of non-dual identification as well as that of distinction.

## NON-DUALITY OF *ŚŪNYA*[40]

Sudden cavity or sudden opening of void in nature can create awe and horror in many of us. The empty space without any object in nature barely gives us a chance for any sensual experience of the depth of the vast sky or the vastness of a closed cave. The two artistic sources that suggest *Śūnya* in their external forms demonstrate that arts' space serves as the ground where we can approach *Śūnya* through the sensual experience along the gradually ordered channelled path.

In art's space, the void space, unfilled, yet charged with our freedom and imagination, exists as free space for manifold forms to intermingle in dynamic flow. There, it is not the

void space alone but its harmony with the manifold forms that ultimately opens up the other layers of Void. Therefore, aesthetic experience of *Wu* or *Śūnya* brings us to the level of space where the infinite depth and infinite vastness overlap and where we realize the depth of boundless space and the boundlessness of enclosed cavity.

## NOTES

1. Similarly, it is applicable to the Śaivaite tradition. Dr Bettina Bäumer points out in the context of 'Śūnya' in Kashmir Śaivism that 'the Śaivaites prefer the adjective Śūnya to the abstract noun Śūnyatā, and the adjective is often used in the sense of a noun', cf. Bettina Bäumer, 'Attain the Form of the Void: Śūnya in Vijñāna Bhairava', Bäumer (ed.), *Void and Fullness in the Buddhist, Hindu and Christian Traditions: Śūnya-Pūrṇa-Pleroma*, Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 2005.
2. Hsia Kuei's paintings are classified as 'Lyric Style' by Western art historians of Chinese arts. It is named so, probably because of its amicable and personal approach to nature in contrast to the impersonal 'Monumental Style', which preceded it in the Northern Sunga Period. Therefore, a viewer of a painting may more easily relate himself to the landscape of 'Lyric Style' than to a landscape of the 'Monumental Style'.
3. The Chinese Mahayana Buddhists, especially during the fifth and sixth centuries AD wrestled with the cognition of *Śūnya* in relation to Neo-Taoist notions of *Kúng* (Emptiness; Vacuity).
4. See Bettina Baumer, 'From Guhā to Ākāśa: The Mystical Cave in the Vedic and Śaiva Traditions', in *Concepts of Space: Ancient and Modern*, ed. by Kapila Vatsyayan, New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), 1991.
5. K.D. Tripathi refers to *hṛdaya* as a core term in the aesthetic terminology in relation to *ākāśa*. He quotes Abhinavagupta's insight of *hṛdaya* in *Parātrīśikā Vivaraṇa* (translated by Jaideva Singh, p. 260); 'it represents the microscopic inner sky in which the entire universe shines, endowed with vibration'. See his article 'From Sensuous to Supersensuous. Some Terms of Indian Aesthetics' in *Prakṛti,* vol. III, Bettina Bäumer, ed., New Delhi: IGNCA, 1995.
6. The regional gazetteers of the nineteenth century give detailed accounts of these caves. In the late nineteenth century, J. Fergusson and J. Burgess set the standard for the study of these cave sites in their work *Cave Temples of India* (1880), providing a precise, site-specific documentation.
7. See Bäumer, 'From Guhā to Ākāśa'.
8. In Korea a monk's secluded chamber for meditation and isolated life is named 'Rock Room' though it is not an excavated room in the rock, but a constructed structure.
9. S. Giedion, *The Eternal Present*, Vol. I: *The Beginning of Art*, New York, 1962.
10. From the very beginning, the apsidal structures in India were intimately associated with the Buddhist religious practices. However, this form did not attain much popularity in the Ganga basin that was the cradle of Buddhist culture. Its highest concentration is found in the rock-cut *caityagṛha* of western India. Another noteworthy fact is that the apsidal shrines in the structural group represented only a subsidiary building, whereas the apsidal form was employed for the main premise in case of the cave monastic complex.
11. See Frederick J. Streng, 'Śūnyam and Śūnyatā', in *Encyclopaedia of Religion (Eliade)*, vol. XIV: 153-9.
12. Streng, '*Śūnyam* and *Śūnyatā*': 156.
13. See Frank E. Reynolds/Charles Hallisey, 'Buddhism. An Overview', in *EncRel (Eliade)*, vol. II: 334-51.
14. See Geri H. Manlandra, *Unfolding of Mandala: The Buddhist Cave Temples at Ellora*, Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, Indian Books Centre, 1997 (originally published Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).
15. The intention of appreciation of landscape paintings is clearly indicated by the earliest extant canon of landscape paintings, '*Hua Shan Shui Xu*' by Chong Bing (AD 375-443): '. . . When we sit in front of landscape painting . . . having rested on *Li* (Principle) and controlled *Chi* (Vital Energy), we can reach the ultimate of the cosmos even while sitting in stillness and enjoy the ideal world of *Wu-Wei* nature even without escaping from the secular world that is filled with evil spirit. . . . *Tao* of the ancient learned saints evokes, we are amalgamated with the ethereal spirit of manifold and the subject and the object become the One. . . . We are liberated completely from the bond of mundane world. . .'.
16. Guo Xi lived from AD 1020-90. The text was edited by Guo Xi's scholar-official son, Guo Si around AD 1110-17.
17. Translated into English by the author from the quotation published in Fù Guān Xù, *'Essence and Spirit of Chinese Arts'*, Korean translation by Duck-Joo Kwon, etc., Seoul: Dongmoonseon, 1990: 269
18. Wang-Pi was a neo-Taoist commentator of the Wei period. He wrote one of the earliest and most influential commentaries on *'Tao-te-ching'* of Lao-tzu which are extant today.
19. Young-Oak Kim, *Lao-tzu and 21st Century*, vol. II, Seoul: Tongnamoo, 1999: 29-30 (translated from Korean by the author).
20. *Tao-Te Ching of Lao-tzu*, trans. Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English, New York: Vintage Books, 1972.
21. *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, transl. Burton Watson, New York: Columbia University Press, 1968: 50-1.
22. We read in Lao-tzu's *Tao-te-Ching*, Ch. 12:
    'The five colours blind the eye.
    The five tones deafen the ear.
    The five flavours dull the taste.
    Racing and hunting madden the mind.
    Precious things lead on astray.
    Therefore the sage is guided by what he feels and not by what he sees.
    He lets go of that and chooses this.' (*Tao-Te Ching*)
23. According to his biography given in *Song Shū* (Record of Song), vol. 93, he went to the mountains from his early age and studied under a Buddhist monk (see Fù Guān Xù: 266). Thus, it is assumed that his theory of landscape paintings implies Buddhist viewpoints as well as general Taoist traits.
24. Fù Guān Xù: 289.
25. Ibid.: 388.
26. Quoted from *Bifa Ji*.
27. 'Bifa Ji', in Xù.
28. Quoted in F. J. Streng, 'Śūnyam and Śūnyatā'.
29. See *Buddhist Iconography*, published by Tibet House, New Delhi: 54.
30. See Lilian Silburn, 'The Seven Voids': *Hermes* 6: 214, quoted in B. Bäumer, 'Attain the Form of the void'.
31. Swami Lakshman Joo, *Vijñāna Bhairava: The Practice of Centring Awareness*, Varanasi: Indica, 2002.
32. Lao-tzu, Ch. 14:
    'Look, it cannot be seen – it is beyond form;
    Listen, it cannot be heard – it is beyond sound;
    Grasp, it cannot be held – it is intangible;
    These three are indefinable;
    Therefore, they are joined in One. . .'.
33. Lao-tzu, Ch. 1: 'The named (*Tao*) is the mother of ten thousand things.'
    Lao-tzu, Ch. 40: 'Returning is the motion of the *Tao*. Yielding is the way of the *Tao*. The ten thousand things are born of being. Being is born of not being.'

34. Thirty spokes represent the time: Thirty days in a month. The chariot wheel discovered from the Great Tomb of the Emperor of Chin proves thirty spokes of a wheel.
35. Lao-tzu, Ch. 4.
36. See Wing-Tsit Chan, 'Neo-Confucianism', in Mircea Eliade, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, vol. IV, New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987: 25-6.
    Chang-Hsai's philosophy that correlates *Hsu*, *Chi* and *Ho* reminds us of Taoist view as is introduced in the present article in the interpretation of Lao-tzu, Ch. 11. Neo-Confucianism is connected with Taoism in many ways; Chou Tun-I (AD 1017-73) who is regarded as the true founder of Neo-Confucian philosophy had got the Diagram of the Great Ultimate from a Taoist priest, Chen Tuan (AD 906-89) and wrote the most influential book *Explanation of the Diagram of the Great Ultimate* in Neo-Confucian development.
37. One's movement plays a decisive role in the perception of space. Space perception results from a dynamic viewpoint, not from a single viewpoint. S. Giedion writes in his book *The Eternal Present*: 'In the realm of architecture, space is experienced by means of observation, in which the senses of sight and touch are interlocked. In the first instance this is a simple statement of fact. But through the relations of the most diverse elements and the degree of their emphasis, a matter of simple physical observation can be transposed to another sphere.' He further points out that the transformation of a physical fact into emotional experience derives from the human faculty of abstraction.
38. Quoted from Tripathi, p. 69; *Parātrīśikā Vivaraṇa*, translated by Jaideva Singh, ed. Bettina Bäumer, Motilal Banarsidass: Delhi, 1988: 52.
39. Quoted from the chapter called 'Zhai Wu Lun' (Discussion on Making all Things Equal), in *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*: 49.
40. *Śūnya* is particularly defined as Non-Duality by the Vijñānavāda School of Buddhism, as the present article has introduced earlier. The text *'Vijñāna Bhairava'* of the Śaiva tradition refers to the term *'Advaya Śūnya'* in *Dhāraṇā* 89.

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# SACRED LANDSCAPES IN ASIA

## *Shared Traditions, Multiple Histories*

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