

## On Chinese Traditional Landscape Painting in and after Li Tang's Times

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### Abstract

A general survey is introduced in this thesis regarding the Chinese landscape painting of the Southern Song dynasty during the mid-and-late 12th century, i.e. between Li Tang's death who heads the list of 'the Four Great Masters of the Southern Song dynasty' and Liu Songnian's reputation as a renowned artist, which surpasses a span of 40 years.

In the early Song dynasty the traditional Chinese landscapes artistry was experiencing a special context in which *Ci*, a type of classical Chinese poetry, got fully developed which was expressed in the bold, unconstrained and enthusiastic manner, the humid climate and landform across the lower reaches of the Changjiang River differed from that of the north of China, and most of all, Emperor Gaozong highly praised the image composition embodying the typical features of the south. Undoubtedly, it could not go on so well for the landscapes without Emperor Gaozong's support who favoured Li Tang's style that could barely survive at that time as a candidate for the greatest work of art known for its vigorous and impressionistic presentation with freehand brushwork, so much so that, the same way he did in his own gloomy pictures in the mist and drizzle as is recorded in *The Biography of Chinese Painters of the Yuan Dynasty* (Huàjì Bǔyí), which then strongly promoted the popularity of the artistic style of this sort among the imperial Song Court within and outside. Li Tang took up a prominent position in the Song art circle with his green (hills) and blue (waters) color scheme, freehand brushwork via slim strokes strung over like raindrops, bean valves and small ax-cut wrinkles (Cūn) as well as his impressionism reflected in the typical compositions such as the edited image with the chosen details separated from the whole that he created, the one-cornered, one-sided patterns that were developed by Ma Yuan and Xia Gui who were acting as the representatives of the art style, which resulted with the great impact upon the reformation of the panoramic image of the North China.

Li Tang's artistic legacy extended for two generations after he passed away from

his students Xiao Zhao who was more specialized in mountains- and-waters painting with a few masterly strokes and Zhang Xunli who was more expert in drawing with slim brushwork from whom Liu Songnian learned later to the Yan brothers (Yan Ciping and Yan Ciyu) and Li Di who made progress of such a complex compositional model by Li Tang, which was a means of integrating elements into one cohesive image. In details, the artist on one picture drew together mountains and waters and birds and beasts, or formed it with mountains and waters and flowers and birds and others as a complete composition, expecting the landscapes by the Northern school to take in some regional features of the south, which hereby lay solid foundation for the new breed of art school of Ma Yuan and Xia Gui by the periods of Emperor Guangzong and Emperor Ningzong. What's more, many artists liked to create the landscapes in the mist and frost focusing on the special details better than panoramic view in the grand and magnificent way by employing such fully-developed techniques of using writing-brush, prepared Chinese ink for coloring, stroking (Cūn) patterns like horse teeth, ghost face and confused wood. It has been studied that a number of anonymous masterpieces with different artistic styles may be attributed to Xiao Zhao, Zhang Xunli, the Yan brothers and others, upon which was based the lineage which encompassed several branches of the Chinese traditional landscapes of the middle and late 12<sup>th</sup> century.

In addition, a more analysis has been conducted in this thesis concerning the year of death of Li Tang, the periods during which Li Chongxun, Li Song, Li Di and Li Anzhong were active in the art circles and the family tree of the Ma clan as well.

**Keywords:** aesthetic ideal of Emperor Gaozong, the magnificent scene of roaring waves and blowing wind exactly as was expressed in the classical Chinese poetry (*Ci*), the landform of the lower reaches of the Changjiang River, the landscape models by Li Tang, the picture which adopts many elements together for subject matter like hills and waters and birds and animals and people, etc., two generations of intellectuals, artisans, officials fled from the collapsed North Song Court to the South Song Empire