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传统与现代

Tradition and Modernity
Comparative Perspectives

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Traditional Chinese Painting through the Modern European Eye
— The Case of Ludwig Bachhofer

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Ludwig Bachhofer was among the first generation of European scholars who devoted their full academic attention to Asian art. This paper focuses on Bachhofer's writing on traditional Chinese pictorial space in the early twentieth century. It discusses how Bachhofer started his intellectual journey to Chinese art from the contrast and comparison between Europe and East Asia. It also examines how Bachhofer tactfully developed his analytical approach to Chinese art from the paradigms established by Heinrich Wölfflin and Erwin Panofsky. This paper is intended to articulate an intercultural case in the history of art history.

From European Art to Asian Art

The mentor-pupil relation between Heinrich Wölfflin and Ludwig Bachhofer is well known in the field of Asian art, but few can pinpoint when the connection was established. According to Harrie Vanderstappen, Bachhofer's student who succeeded him as the professor of Asian art at the University of Chicago, Bachhofer studied with Wölfflin at Basel University in Switzerland, and received his Ph.D. degree from University of Munich in 1921. ¹ Wölfflin was, however, appointed to the chair of Jacob Burckhardt (1818 – 1897) at Basel in 1893 but moved to Berlin in 1901. ² It is quite impossible that Bachhofer, who was born in

1894, began his scholarly pursuit at age of seven or younger. A more reasonable postulation would be that Bachhofer studied with Wölfflin after Wölfflin left Berlin and taught at University of Munich in 1912. This is confirmed by a graduate list posted by University of Munich. The list, entitled “Completed Dissertations at the Institute for History of Art in Munich” [Abgeschlossene Dissertationen am Institut für Kunstgeschichte in München], unmistakably informs us that under the supervision of Wölfflin, Bachhofer finished his dissertation in 1921.

It is not easy to sketch Wölfflin’s notion of Asian art, for the obvious reason that his academic writings are all about European art. Daniel Adler recently suggests that the exposure to myriad Asian monuments by the end of the nineteenth century may have encouraged Formalists, such as Wölfflin, to adopt more flexible principles to encompass the new diversity and abundance of objects. In his 1922 preface to the sixth edition of Principles of Art History, Wölfflin indeed mentioned that “the scheme has proved applicable even as far as the domains of Japanese and old Nordic art,” after he had explained his intention to “set up standards by which the historical transformation can be more exactly defined,” and after he had also avowed that “our formation of the concepts, however, only corresponds to the development in later times. For other periods, they must undergo continual modification.” Wölfflin clearly displayed his confidence and optimism in the universality of visual principles. With due modifications, those formal standards he established for the transformation from Renaissance art to Baroque art should be applicable to any historical periods and to any cultural areas.

On the other hand, Wölfflin was reported to often toy with the idea of a voyage to

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2 “Abgeschlossene Dissertationen am Institut für Kunstgeschichte in München” at http://www.fak09.uni-muenchen.de/Kunstgeschichte/doktoranden/kunstgeschichte-dissertationen.html. The list includes dissertations submitted from 1873 to the present. Unless otherwise indicated, translations are mine.
India as a means of "gaining a new perspective on European art". When asked whether he had considered visiting major American art collections, Wolfflin replied: "What is the point? It is nothing but an accelerated version of Europe. India and Japan, on the other hand, are marvels: they at least can give one new concepts, new ideas." The anecdote not only shows his general interest in Asian art, it also reveals Wolfflin's fundamental approach to Asian art. His purpose to visit India was not to understand Indian art on its own terms, but to draw inspirations from Indian art for the benefit of reflecting on European art. Wolfflin's attitude toward Asian art was undeniably Eurocentric. Yet one may also acknowledge his relative open-mindedness, if compared to John Ruskin (1819–1900), who held Greek and High Renaissance arts as the yardstick for all aesthetics and went so far as to proclaim that "there is none in America, none in Asia, [and] none in Africa."

Granted his genuine appreciation of Asian art, it is still unclear how Wolfflin would have cultivated an Asian art specialist like Bachhofer. Among the forty-eight dissertations Wolfflin supervised at University of Munich from 1912 to 1924 and in 1927, Bachhofer's project was the only exception that did not deal with any European subject matters. Entitled The Art of the Japanese Woodblock Masters [Die Kunst der japanischen Holzschnittmeister], Bachhofer submitted his research result for graduation in 1921 and soon had the manuscript published in 1922. It is undoubtedly from Bachhofer's groundwork that Wolfflin declared with triumph the applicability of his principles to Japanese art in his 1922 preface. Moreover, having shifted his attention from Japan to India, Bachhofer published his thoroughly investigated two-volumed Early Indian Sculpture [Die frühindische Plastik] both in German and English in 1929. More than well-received, the book was even recommended for the literati who were tired of

1 Kultermann, p. 180.
4 My statistics are based on "Abgeschlossene Dissertationen am Institut für Kunstgeschichte in München."
reading Italian art in London. 1 Wölflin must have kept Bachhofer’s work in his mind when he considered a possible trip to India. Without sufficient information, it is yet difficult to determine whether Wölflin ever encouraged Bachhofer to pursue Asian art, or whether Bachhofer’s bold exploration in turn expanded Wölflin’s vision of art history.

In any case, Bachhofer stood on the very frontier of cultural encounter that demanded him to integrate Wölflin’s teaching, mainly extracted from European examples, into his more or less independent study of Asian art. One of Wölflin’s renowned pedagogic legacies was normalizing, if not inventing, the use of two slide projectors in the art history classroom for differentiating minute formal subtleties through relentless comparative analyses. 2 While this method encourages acute observations, the constant juxtaposition of two images inevitably reinforces the dualistic mode of thinking. As Wolfgang Born, one of Wölflin’s students, later recalled, “How splendidly selected were his examples! Most of them contrasting types.” 3 Admitting to “make use of exaggerations for purpose of clarification,” 4 Wölflin enjoyed all too well the drama of contrasts, which not only performed in his lecture hall, but also unfolded in his own writing. Most noticeably in Principles of Art History, Wölflin set up Renaissance art and Baroque art as two opposed styles, and put forward five pairs of polar terms to accentuate their differences: linear versus painterly, plane versus recession, closed form versus open form, multiple unity versus unified unity, and absolute clearness versus relative clearness.

Nothing is more striking than the contrast between European art and Asian art, if one seeks the extreme of visual polarization. Bachhofer deftly twisted the tension between Renaissance art and Baroque art into the distinction between

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4 “The lecture has in greater measure the freedom to make use of exaggerations for purpose of clarification (and entertainment), inasmuch as it is in his power to retract them at any moment.” In Heinrich Wölflin, The Sense of Form in Art: A Comparative Psychological Study, trans. A. Meuhseam and N. A. Shatan (New York: Chelsea Publishing Company, 1958), 3; originally published as Italien und das deutsche Formgefühl (München: F. Bruckmann A. G., 1931).
European art and Asian art, while avoiding dogmatically transposing Wölflin's five principles into Asian cases. In his first book on Chinese art, *Chinesische Kunst*, a pamphlet published in 1923 for general audiences, Bachhofer spent an entire chapter polarizing Europe and East Asia [*Europe und Oastasien*]. He began the chapter with the most contradictory features he could detect:

If one compares the art of East Asia and that of Europe, after overcoming the first odd impression, he will soon realize their fundamental differences. In painting, besides the strange and light material, [the differences are] the lack of modeling and the unusual downcast view [*Niedersicht*] for spatial representation; in sculpture, [the difference is] not centering upon human figures.  

Among these identified traits, Bachhofer found the distinctiveness in spatial representation most intriguing. He went on to compare Classic art and Chinese art, reaching the conclusion that the downcast view as a primordial kind of spatial representation was in use both in the West and in the East. Nevertheless, Europeans had progressed to central perspective that was scientific-oriented, whereas East Asians still maintained the downcast view that was purely emotional [*gefühlsmäßig*].

It is from the contrast between Europe and East Asia that Bachhofer became interested in Chinese pictorial space. Apparently unsatisfied with his earlier oversimplified statement, Bachhofer published in 1931 his longest journal article entitled "The Representation of Space in Chinese Painting during the First Thousand Years of the Christian Era" [*Die Raumdarstellung in der Chinesischen Malerei des ersten Jahrtausends n. Chr.*]. The paper came out seven years after

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2 Ibid., pp. 22–23.
3 Ludwig Bachhofer, "Die Raumdarstellung in der Chinesischen Malerei des ersten Jahrtausends n. Chr.," *Münchner Jahrbuch der Bildenden Kunst* 8 (1931): pp. 193–242 (hereafter Bachhofer, 1931a); translated by Harold Joachim as "Space Conceptions in Chinese Painting during the First Millennium after Christ" (unpublished manuscript, Rubel Library, Harvard University) (hereafter Bachhofer, 1931b); also translated as "The Representation of Space in Chinese Painting during the First Thousand Years of the Christian Era" (translator unknown, Bachhofer Archive, M. E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archive, State University of New York, Albany). My English quotation is mainly based on Joachim’s translation.
Paul Pelliot made all his photographs of Dunhuang murals public, and four years after Erwin Panofsky made his reflection upon perspective officially known to the field. Compared to what was available in 1923, Bachhofer rose on a completely new horizon regarding both Chinese visual materials and Western analytical tools.

**Articulation of Chinese Perspective**

Where pictorial space is concerned, Bachhofer may have found Wölfflin’s second principle—plane versus recession—appealing. Wölfflin invented the oppositional terms to address two different spatial renditions he observed: in Renaissance art, space is bound to a parallel plane that favors a side-by-side connection; while in Baroque art, depth is created along a diagonal recession that prefers an into-the-picture effect. By comparing Palma Vecchio (1480–1528) and Tintoretto (1518–1594), Wölfflin more clearly pointed out how in Tintoretto’s painting “the figures have withdrawn into the picture, a diagonal movement goes from Adam to Eve, held by the landscape with the distant light to the horizon” (Figs. 1, 2).¹ For him, the two examples, among many others, perfectly explained “the transposition of the alignment in two-figure scenes into a diagonal recession.”²

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¹ Wölfflin, 1950/1915, p.76.
² Ibid., p.75.
Bachhofer discovered a comparable development from plane to recession in early Chinese art, establishing his successive series of stone carvings from the earlier Wu family shrines through the Xiaotangshan shrine to the later Zhu Wei shrine.¹ He figured that “the pictorial elements are placed beside and above each other, most in long horizontal rows, sometimes in a freely handled symmetry” on the stones of the Wu family shrines (Fig. 3).²

¹ Scholars now are inclined to place the Xiaotangshan carvings in the 1st century, the Wu carvings in the 2nd half of the 2nd century, and the Zhu Wei carvings in the late 2nd century to the early 3rd century. See Jiang Yingju, ed., Zhongguo huaxiangshi quanjji (Complete Collection of Chinese Stone Carvings), vol. 1.
² Bachhofer, 1931c, p. 4.
He also inspected that “the depth lines of the carriage body run diagonally” in the case of Xiaotangshan. He further admired the carvings in the Zhu Wei shrine, where “the participants are seated in two rows that incline towards each other diagonally” (Fig. 4).

![Fig. 4 Drawing of the stone carving from the Zhu Wei shrine. 2nd to 3rd century.](image)

Bachhofer’s twist of Wölflin’s second principle is phenomenal. It is particularly noteworthy that the pictorial space Wölflin dealt with in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Europe has already been “materially supported by the lighting and the perspective.” The pictorial space Bachhofer explored in second- and third-century China has, on the contrary, not yet shown the full awareness of three-dimensional illusion. The contrast of plane and recession in Bachhofer’s usage thus does not illustrate the visual effects resulted from the manipulation of alignments and station points, but refers to the stage where the third dimension is struggled to be represented.

Intelligibility notwithstanding, plane and recession are, after all, not sufficient to explain the nuance of pictorial space in its early stage of development. Bachhofer had to looked elsewhere for stimulation. The first person he mentioned in his 1931 paper as passing knowledge was Gustaf Britsch

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1 Bachhofer, 1931e, p. 20.
2 Bachhofer, 1931e, p. 9.
(1879 – 1923). As the founder of the “Institute for the Science of Liberal and Applied Arts” [Institut für freie und angewandte Kunstwissenschaft], Britsch is now better known in art education than in art history, due to his attention to children’s artistic activities. However, Britsch spent most of his lifetime learning and teaching the universal laws governing the creation of artistic form, and starting in 1910, he frequently offered seminars in Munich to advocate his views. Wolflin, who was among the most distinguished listeners, was reported to send “students to Britsch to hear lectures on architectural theory.” Bachhofer must have been one of the students who attended Britsch’s lectures, for he still remembered what Britsch termed as “divergence of directions” [Richtungsverschiedenheit] when he analyzed early Chinese pictorial space.

Bachhofer was particularly interested in the discernment of directional relationships, from which he formulated his theory of spatial consciousness and proposed three stages of evolution. The simplest directional discernment, he believed, is given by the greatest contrast in directions, such as something directed “vertically” in contrast to something directed “horizontally”. The second stage of directional discernment is found in the variability of directions, such as the “branches” growing out of the “trunk” and the “stems”. The more advanced stage then appears in the extension of variable directions.

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1 Bachhofer, 1931e, 5: 1931g, p. 197. Bachhofer mentioned Britsch’s full name, but did not provide any related references.


3 Ibid., p.406.

Britsch’s discussion of variable directions helped Bachhofer to examine the spatial consciousness of the Xiaotangshan carving (Fig. 5):

Most revealing is the mixture of ground plan and elevation plan in the scene when a bronze tripod is being raised from a river. The river and the squares of the field are seen in ground plan, but men in boats and on land are seen in profile. In order to gain a baseline for the spectators on land, the lines of the riverbank are horizontal in the upper part of the picture. All this proves that a spatial consciousness has not yet developed. This is what Gustaf Britsch called “divergence of directions”. ¹

By employing Wölflin’s second principle and Britsch’s directional relationships, Bachhofer may have managed to clarify the pictorial space in early China, but his urgent concern had been the emergence of perspective in medieval China—a phenomenon he was unaware of in his 1923 work and only began to realize after Paul Pelliot’s more inclusive introduction to the Dunhuang murals around 1924. ² Both Wölflin and Britsch were not inclined to tackle issues surrounding perspective. For Wölflin, the foundation of the stylistic

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¹ Bachhofer, 1931e, 5; 1931g, p.197.
² Paul Pelliot, Les grottes de Touen-Houang: Peintures et sculptures bouddhiques des époques des Wei, des T’ang et des Song, 6 vols. (Paris: Librairie Paul Geuthner, 1914 – 1924). The book chiefly contains the photographs Pelliot took in his expeditions to China. It only provides Bachhofer with primary sources. He had to analyze visual materials and scrutinized the chronological order on his own.
development is not to imitate nature or to achieve the "true" expression of nature. 1 In his analysis of Titian's (ca. 1488 – 1576) The Murder of St. Peter Martyr, Wölfflin even contended that it "produces the same [tectonic] impression without having a central axis." 2 Britsch, likewise, did not envision the evolution of art as leading toward a more "realistic" or more "correct" rendering of nature. 3 He measured artistic accomplishment by the degree of unity as manifested in the relationship of parts within a whole. 4 He simply insisted that "a consistent perspective system was achieved by nonmathematical means, by the maintenance of a unified spatial concept throughout the work." 5

Again, Bachhofer had to look beyond Wölfflin and Britsch for inspiration. The second, and the last, person he mentioned similarly as passing knowledge in his 1931 article was Erwin Panofsky (1892 – 1968). 6 Unlike Wölfflin and Britsch, young Panofsky had the courage to embrace and unravel the tangle of art and science, particularly perspective and its mathematical and optical implications. Not only did he confidently claim that the projective geometry, like many subfields of modern science, is a product of the artist's workshop; he even argued that perspective could be both objective and subjective. All his insights were curiously crafted into his "Perspective as 'Symbolic Form'" [Die Perspektive als "Symbolische Form"], a paper first delivered as a lecture at the Warburg Library of Cultural Science in Hamburg in 1924 and was not in print until 1927. 7

It is in the discussion of representing human faces that Bachhofer referred to Panofsky and his notion of "Rißreihung":

In the beginning, the three-quarter view of the human face was nothing but a combination of front and profile. However, together with the

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1 Wölfflin, 1950/1915, p. 28.
3 4 Andersen, p. 390.
5 Ibid., 394; Britsch, pp. 79 – 91.
6 Bachhofer, 1931c, 6: 1931g, p. 198. Bachhofer only mentioned Panofsky's last name. He did not specify any related sources.
“Riβreihung,” as Panofsky so calls, the combination has educated the artist’s eye for the realistic three-quarter view.  

The term “Riβ-reihung” appears in a very lengthy note explaining the early stage of spatial representation in Panofsky’s essay on perspective:

An initial “archaic” epoch... seeks to reduce corporeal objects to the purest possible ground plan and elevations. The spatial relationships of these objects to one another can thus be suggested either by a combination of these two formal types...; or by a juxtaposition or superposition of elevations. The last method is usually described as lateral or vertical “staggering,” and it should be pointed out—that this is not actually to be interpreted as an oblique view, in fact not as a “view” at all, but rather only as “Riβ-reihung”.  

It would be rather absurd if one only read Bachhofer’s paragraph without knowing how Panofsky articulated “combination” and “staggering” as two modes of archaic spatial representation. Riβ is the shared noun found in Grundriβ (ground plan) and Aufrriβ (elevation). Panofsky coined the term Riβ-reihung to emphasize, more vividly, that the mode of “staggering” does not depict any slant or slope, but presents only a row of juxtaposed or superposed ground plans or elevations. Borrowing the term, Bachhofer intended to argue that early Chinese artisans somehow found their ways to the three-quarter view through a long practice of either combining or staggering front and profile two different views.

Although this is the only citation of Panofsky in Bachhofer’s article, what Bachhofer owed Panofsky is far more than this trivial, if not insignificant, detail. For Bachhofer, what was most inspiring was, in fact, how Panofsky clearly defined the loosely termed “central perspective” as vanishing-axis perspective and vanishing-point perspective, and how Panofsky comprehensibly established the sequential development of perspective from the parallel through the vanishing axis all the way to the vanishing point. These achievements became the foundation on which Bachhofer erected his own edifice.

1 Bachhofer, 1931e, 6; 1931g, p.198.
2 Panofsky, 1927e, 105; 1927g, pp.305 – 306. Wood translates “Riβ-reihung” as “a row of outlines.”
Bachhofer defined three stages for the development of Chinese pictorial space from the second to the tenth centuries, after combing hundreds of images that were brought to light mainly by the French Sinologists Edouard Chavannes (1865–1918) and Paul Pelliot (1878–1945), the Hungarian adventurer Aurel Stein (1862–1943), the Finnish art historian Osvald Sirén (1879–1966), and his own countryman Otto Fischer (1886–1948). According to Bachhofer, the first stage shows the divergence of directions, an observation borrowed from Britsch, which can be seen in the aforementioned Xiaotangshan carving (Fig. 5).¹ It actually refers to the “combination” of ground plans and elevations on a picture plane, as Panofsky also pointed out in the representation of an Egyptian garden (Fig. 6).²

Fig. 6 Egyptian representation of a garden. New Kingdom.

¹ Bachhofer, 1931e, p. 43, pp. 4–5.
² Panofsky, 1927e, 106. It is noteworthy that Britsch used another similar representation of the Egyptian garden as an example to explain his “divergence of directions.” See Britsch, p. 46.
The second stage, starting from the third century, is characterized by parallel perspective. \(^1\) It indicates the differentiation of the rear view from the front view, and the placement of the rear view behind or above the front view. The spatial depth is thus suggested by the juxtaposition or superposition of these differentiated elevations, a progression from Panofsky's other archaic "staggering" mode. Bachhofer found an early Chinese demonstration of parallel perspective on a stone carving in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, where the second wheel of the carriage appears on a higher level than the first one (Fig. 7). \(^2\) The MFA carving is certainly comparable with, if not the same as, the Greek vase painting exemplified in Panofsky's article (Fig. 8).

![Fig. 7 Stone carving in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. 2\(^{nd}\) to 3\(^{rd}\) century.](image)

The third stage is then distinguished by the vanishing-axis perspective, which begins approximately in the sixth century in China. \(^3\) It denotes the convergence of the depth lines into the central axis of the picture plane. Such pictorial space can be better understood through the murals of the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang, like the representation of the Western Paradise on the north wall of Cave 320 (Fig. 9). \(^4\) The Paradise is defined by the gigantic

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1. Bachhofer, 1931e, p. 43, pp. 6–18.
2. Bachhofer, 1931e, p. 43, p. 6.
Amitabha Buddha at the center and the tiny reborn figures in the front, with attending Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and entertainers in between. The central Buddha is seated on a high platform, whose three sides are surrounded by elaborate buildings, and whose face is connected by a bridge to the middle of the three terraces that form the foreground. The orthogonals extended from the terraces in the foreground and from the roofs in the background run symmetrically toward a common vanishing line that cuts through the central Buddha. Though much more complicated, such a “consistent geometrical organization,” as Bachhofer so paraphrased, is surely an analogue to the European examples Panofsky singled out, be it the first appearance of the vanishing-axis perspective in Roman fresco (Fig. 10), or its reemergence in late Gothic painting (Fig. 11).
Fig. 9  Mural in Cave 320, Mogao Grottoes, Dunhuang. 8th century.
Fig. 10  Wall decoration in stucco and paint from Boscoreale. 5th century.

Fig. 11  Duccio di Buoninsegna, *Last Super from the Maesta*. 1301 – 1308.
While dealing with the transition from vanishing-axis perspective to vanishing-point perspective, Panofsky was first struck by Ambrogio Lorenzetti’s (ca. 1290 – 1348) *Annunciation*, where the visible orthogonals of the ground plane are all oriented toward a single point (Fig. 12). Nevertheless, he was quick to detect the vagueness caused by the two figures that extend all the way to the edges and inevitably hide the lateral segments of space. One therefore cannot determine “whether those orthogonals that would begin outside the picture frame and run past the figures at the right and left would also converge in the single point.” Panofsky further concluded that “one would rather doubt it,” for he had discovered another Lorenzetti painting that displays the evasion of the orthogonal at the edges from the central vanishing point of the ground plane (Fig. 13).  

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1, 2, 3 Panofsky, 1927b, pp. 57 – 58.
In a similar fashion, Bachhofer argued for the ambiguity found in the preaching scene on the east wall of Cave 332 in Dunhuang (Fig. 14). He admitted that “To the European eye, the convergence of the sidelines of the throne and of the base in front of it is surprising. We might think we are faced with a central perspective construction, which fixes the eye on a single point.”¹ However, one can hardly settle the case when the indexical orthogonals from the edges of the picture plane are vaguely suggested by the standing grounds of the two symmetrically arrayed groups of figures. The uncertainty prompted him to examine a wide range of pictorial works from the sixth to the tenth centuries, paying special attention to those with more explicit tectonic depiction on the picture edges, such as tapestries, ponds or terraces. When all the examples point to the same compositional feature as found in Cave 320, Bachhofer confidently decided that the mural in Cave 332 is de facto “a vanishing-axis construction,

¹ Bachhofer, 1931e, 20. Cave 332 is Cave 146 by Pelliot, p. 15.
while the object happens to be in the middle of the picture”. ¹

The more he studied Dunhuang murals, the farther Bachhofer must have kept his distance from the bold announcement he made in his 1923 book that there is no perspective in Chinese painting. Still, it is undeniable to him that “a forth stage which was so important in the Western painting is missing”. ² In other words, the spatial consciousness in China has not progressed from vanishing-axis perspective to vanishing-point perspective.

The evolutionary mode of thinking, together with the Eurocentric point of view, easily leads one to advance the theory of Western influence. Surprisingly, Bachhofer did not follow the trend, even though his case could have been more compelling, given the fact that Buddhist art was introduced to China from India,

¹ Bachhofer, 1931e, 20. Cave 332 is Cave 146 by Pelliot, p.15.
² Ibid., p.42.
where the Hellenistic presence had been evident. Bachhofer, on the contrary, refuted the assumption that vanishing-axis perspective may have been transmitted from Europe through India to China.  

Whereas the naturalistic approach to sculpture in Gandhara reveals a distinctive Hellenistic touch, Bachhofer, influenced by his investigation of the murals in Ajanta, seriously questioned if the idea of an organized and unified picture plane was ever known to Indian art, or if Indian painters ever sought spatial unity.  

He thus strongly advocated that the vanishing-axis perspective as seen in Dunhuang murals was a Chinese device.

It is from the point of cultural differences that Bachhofer shined under the shadow of Panofsky. First of all, Bachhofer was astounded to find that “in contrast to Europe, where the awakened feeling for space affected the interior first, China experimented with landscape [the exterior] at the very outset.” As he so astutely observed, “the task was extremely difficult, because nature in her thousandfold phenomena avoids straight lines and right angles, which are so helpful for orientation.” He thus began his study by looking at how early Chinese artists “invent devices for organizing the confusing forms of polymorphous nature”. One of the most efficient and popular devices he discovered is the “spatial cells” that are defined by rows of hills and trees, and that are allowed to extend both vertically and horizontally. The early experiment on spatial cells can be found on the east wall of Cave 428 in Dunhuang, where, as Bachhofer remarked, “men, animals and buildings actually stand on the ground of the landscape and no longer besides or above it,” even though “the connection between the cells is still very loose” (Fig. 15). While Panofsky built his argument about ancient European pictorial space upon the interior details such as roof coffers, Bachhofer argued his early Chinese case from the exterior elements like the spatial cells in landscape.

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1 Bachhofer, 1931e, 20. Cave 332 is Cave 146 by Pelliot, p. 42.
2 Ibid., pp. 34 – 35.
3 Bachhofer, 1931e, 20. Cave 332 is Cave 146 by Pelliot.
Moreover, Bachhofer formulated an “artistic trinity” that consists of the downcast view, parallel perspective and continuous narrative to characterize Chinese pictorial art. ¹

Already intrigued by the downcast view in his 1923 book, Bachhofer, with his more substantial study of Dunhuang murals, began to appreciate the advantage of representing a scene seen from above. He realized that “this device fulfills the desire for depicting a narrative with great accuracy.” ² The combination of the downcast view and continuous narrative is therefore “natural, for both seek utmost clarity”. ³ He further inferred that “parallel perspective joins the two as the only possible way of rendering cubic bodies,” because the spatial cells, when surveyed from above, can only have a limited extension toward depth.⁴ Again, he was caught in the seemingly inevitable comparison between China and Europe: the parallel perspective “enables the eye to glide over the whole picture, whereas the central perspective and the vanishing-axis system

² Bachhofer, 1931e, 20. Cave 428 is Cave 135 by Pelliot. Bachhofer dated this cave to 530 – 540; the Dunhuang Institute placed it slightly later in Northern Zhou (557 – 581). See The Dunhuang Institute for Cultural Relics, p. 25.
fix the eye to the center". ¹ And yet, he considered the fusion of the three devices to be "one of the greatest achievements of Far Eastern art".² The mural on the south wall of Cave 217, as Bachhofer recognized, explains exactly such a fusion (Fig. 16).³

From the prevalence of parallel perspective, Bachhofer discovered an even distinguishing feature—the "vanishing-axis perspective and parallel perspective live in harmony side by side" in China.⁴ He especially took note of the murals depicting the Western Paradise, on which icons and scenes in the Paradise are organized by vanishing-axis composition at the center, whereas the stories of

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¹² Bachhofer, 1931e, 20. Cave 428 is Cave 135 by Pelliot. Bachhofer dated this cave to 530 – 540; the Dunhuang Institute placed it slightly later in Northern Zhou (557 – 581). See The Dunhuang Institute for Cultural Relics, p. 25.
³ Cave 217 is Cave 70 by Pelliot.
⁴ Bachhofer, 1931e, p. 43.
"sixteen meditations" are unfolded vertically by parallel perspective at two sides (Fig. 9). While parallel perspective is beneficial for continuous narrative, he believed vanishing-axis perspective best suits the symmetrical composition of devotional representation. He therefore reasoned that the simultaneous preservation of both is certainly due to the insight that different tasks require different methods of solution."1 In keeping with the European model, Bachhofer could not resist adding that the task "does not include the spatial feeling for consistency in one and the same moment".2 Still, the path he clarified for the development of Chinese pictorial space—from parallel perspective to vanishing-axis perspective, but never abandoning parallel perspective—must have been refreshing for his European colleagues who had been so used to the linear progress from parallel to vanishing-axis and to vanishing-point perspectives, despite the fact that Classical, Medieval and Renaissance could be orchestrated by Panofsky as a Hegelian dialectical course of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis.3

More strikingly, Bachhofer argued that even relying on parallel perspective and vanishing-axis perspective, medieval Chinese artisans were capable of reaching an infinite unity on the picture plane. One of the examples he cited is the depiction of the celebrated Buddhist pilgrimage site Mt. Wutai on the west wall of Cave 61 (Fig. 17).4 The central section of this huge and very elongated picture is composed by vanishing-axis perspective, although it can only be well examined in situ, for this section is right behind a high-backed platform on which a sculptural icon was once placed. Extended from the central section toward two edges are numerous improved spatial cells that are more logically interconnected in terms of scale and distance provide convincing grounds for men, animals, and buildings. As what amazed Bachhofer, "space is all-encompassing and unconfined now."5 Indeed, engrossed in continuous narrative, Chinese artisans developed their unique sense of infinity by allowing small spatial cells to grow endlessly. This again strikes a drastic contrast with the European experience, which, according to Panofsky, shows that a spatial infinity can only be accomplished by vanishing-point perspective, and can only exist in the beholder's imagination, following the

12 Bachhofer, 1931e, p.43.
3 Panofsky, 1927e, pp. 47 ~ 48.
4 Cave 61 is Cave 117 by Pelliot.
5 Bachhofer, 1931e, p.42.
radiation of a fixed central point to the suggested expansion beyond the picture frame. ¹

Fig. 17 Mural in Cave 61, Mogao Grottoes, Dunhuang. 10th century.

Approaching Chinese pictorial space exclusively in light of perspective, as Bachhofer did, may easily stir up the critic of being Eurocentric. Eurocentrism is certainly repulsive to non-Europeans, particularly when it moved along with even unwelcome Imperialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, Eurocentrism is also helplessly a necessity for Europeans, if we believe the

¹ Panofsky, 1927e, pp. 60–61.
hermeneutic notion, as articulated by Gadamer, that an act of understanding the other is nothing but a process of foregrounding the self. What Bachhofer reveals in his 1931 article is therefore not so much about Chinese pictorial convention as about his reconciliation between Wölfflin and Panofsky within the very European intellectual tradition.

内容提要(Summary):

现代欧洲眼里的中国传统绘画
——以路德维格·巴哈佛 (Ludwig Bachhofer) 为例

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路德维格·巴哈佛 (Ludwig Bachhofer) 属于倾注毕生之力研究亚洲艺术的第一代欧洲学者。本文以巴哈佛发表于 20 世纪初期的著述为主, 讨论他如何从欧洲与亚洲的对比中开始定义中国艺术的特色, 并对中国的绘画空间产生兴趣。本文进而探究巴哈佛如何援引当代德国的艺术史学论述来解析中国绘画空间, 特别是沃夫林 (Heinrich Wölfflin) 形式分析的取径以及潘诺夫斯基 (Erwin Panofsky) 对透视原理和其历史进程的研究成果。本文希望能由艺术史学史的角度来思考与东西文化碰撞有关的议题。

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