

Significance of Analogy-Drawing Between *Go* and Painting

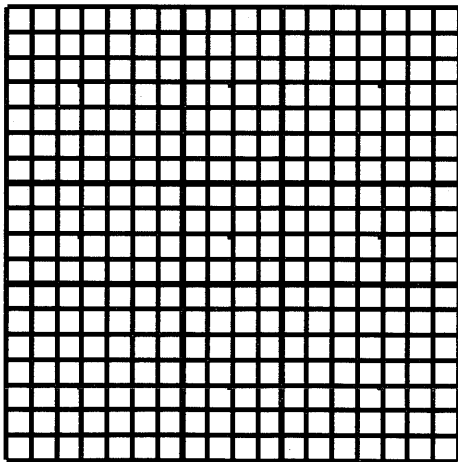
GAO Jianping

Many Chinese painters, from ancient up to modern times, have compared painting with different kinds of human activities, such as calligraphy, dance, music, as well as *go*, a board game played by two competitors. They articulate their theories of painting through these analogies, and reciprocally, these analogies have enlightened them on many important issues in painting.

In this essay I am going to explore the aesthetic implications of analogy-drawing between *go* and painting. *Go*-playing and picture-making are two different human activities, the former being a game, whereas the latter is an artistic activity. However, in the eyes of many ancient Chinese painters, they are closely related to each other and share numerous features. This is of course not a challenge to the modern concept of the fine arts formulated by, say, Charles Batteux, because there was no corresponding concept in the mind of the Chinese in ancient times, but an analogy such as this can inspire us to make certain interesting discoveries.

1. The differences between *go* and painting

Before we compare *go* with painting, I would first like to give a brief introduction of *go*.



(Picture 1)

Go was a game originally popular in China, Japan and Korea and now is gaining more acceptance in other parts of the world. As a game, it belongs in the same category as chess and is usually played by two competitors. However, unlike chess, *go* is played on a board of square grids formed by 19 horizontal and 19 vertical lines, which forms 361 intersections, or cross points. (See Picture 1)

Unlike chess, *go* starts with an empty board without any chessmen on it. The players put small pieces of stones on the cross points. Once a stone is laid, it should remain there unless it is killed and thus removed from the board. No stone is allowed to change its position from one place to another on the board.

There are two colours of stones (black and white), and each of the two players takes one. The black player usually puts a stone first, which begins the game, and then the white, and then

the black, and so on and so forth. Each of them puts a stone down in alternation. At the left is the record of a game. The numbers on each of the stones show the sequence of their placement on the board. (See Picture 2)

We can also see from the picture that there are three possibilities for the cross points: black, white, and empty. The empty ones are enclosed by either black or white ones, and thus belong to them separately.

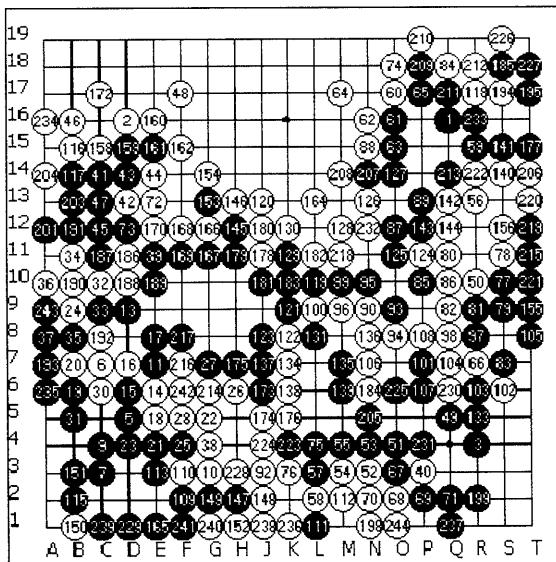
The stones are linked to be bunches or groups. In Chinese, *go* is called *weiqi*, or enclosing chess. The word *wei* bears two meanings: the first is to surround the opponent's stones. If a group of stones is being surrounded by the opponent's ones, it should try to stay alive. A surrounded group with at least two empty points (called eyes or traps) inside is called alive, otherwise it is called dead. The two players are supposed to "fight" with each other in order to "kill" the stones of the opponent, and "protect" those of his own. A group of "killed" stones have to be removed from the board, or they will be eventually removed, for example, 40, 102, 150 of white stones are dead in the picture.

The second, and more fundamental meaning of *wei* is to enclose more space, or occupy more territory on the board. Since there are only 361 points on the grid of the board, the winner of the game is supposed to take the larger share of them. This means to use the stones effectively to enclose more empty points; for example, there are many empty points belonging to the white in the upper part of the picture because they are enclosed by white stones.

When we look at the record of a *go* game, the stones are organized into certain forms, but it would be wrong to look at them in the same way as one looks at a picture. These forms do not have meanings themselves, but are only the result of the player's intention to capture more territory and kill the stones of the opponent.

territory and kill the stones of the opponent.

In contrast to the playing of *go*, the making of a painting is obviously a different activity. A painter is supposed to create images with his brush. Like painting in many other nations, Chinese painting originated from the impulse of keeping the forms of objects, either imaginary or real, and thus served secular or religious purposes. The styles of painting can vary in accordance with their usage and other social and historical reasons; some of them are more realistic, and others are more abstract. But, as long as it is the art of painting, it has to



(Picture 2)

represent the object's form.

Ancient Chinese gave many definitions of painting. Most of them, especially those before the tenth century, stress that painting is to keep the appearance of the object. For example, Lu Ji (261-303), a poet in the third century, compared painting with literature in the following statement: "For making things widely known nothing is greater than speech, but for preserving the appearance [of those things] there is nothing better than painting."¹ To him, painting is the best means to preserve the appearances of things, and herein lies the difference between painting and literature. In this way, Lu Ji tells us what painting is, and, more importantly, this remark was quoted by Zhang Yanyuan, a ninth century painting historian, and later became one of the authoritative definitions of painting in China. Consequently, Lu Ji's originally descriptive statement was transformed into a normative requirement. Another writer Yan Yanzhi (384-456) tried to distinguish three different signs: painting, character writing and the symbolic hexagrams in the *Book of Changes*. He maintains that painting is to represent "forms", in contrast to the characters which aim to show the "knowledge," and to hexagrams whose goal is to reveal certain "reasons" behind the appearance of the nature.² In accordance to these definitions, the ultimate end of painting is to represent the appearance of objects and nature. Even today, the Chinese often sneer with an idiom at those who are over ambitious but end in failure: drawing a tiger like a dog (trying to draw a tiger but end up with the resemblance of a dog). To them, a good painter should be able to make lifelike pictures. If not so, he is not a qualified painter. The formal resemblance is indeed a great tradition both in the West and in China.

This may be called a perceptual attitude towards painting. A painter with a perceptual attitude paints on the basis of his visual perception. This does not mean that he always produces a lifelike painting. Art historians find that many ancient painters may consciously or unconsciously distort their images of the object. Nevertheless, all of those who produce pictures in accordance with their perception, or judge a painting in connection with what is painted, can be regarded as advocates of the perceptual attitude.

The vision of human beings is complex; it has been constantly changing with transformations of social contexts. A picture that is regarded as lifelike by one generation may not be viewed so by another generation. Ernst Gombrich explains this issue with his formula of "schema and correction" (in *Art and Illusion*) and "recall and recognition" (in *The Image and the Eye*). These two formulae contain many innovative views, but because he evaluates different styles of painting by checking if they match what was seen, and glorifies the styles based on what one sees while playing down those based on what one *knows* or *feels* (see also his *The Story of Art*), his theoretical horizon is limited to human beings' perception. Another important scholar Rudolf Arnheim is famous for his perceptualist approach to art. His approach

1) This sentence is quoted from Zhang Yanyuan's *Record of Painters of All the Dynasties*, Book 2. English translation quoted from Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih, eds., *Early Chinese Text on Painting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 28.

2) These words are quoted from Zhang Yanyuan's *Record of Painters of All the Dynasties*, Book 2. English translation can be seen from Bush and Shih, p. 22.

has been established with the help of Gestalt psychology. It stresses the importance of visual organization activities and contends that perceptual states are supported by “isomorphic” structures in the underlying brain processes (in *Art and Visual Perception*). James J. Gibson, on the other hand, holds a more directly perceptual attitude. He endeavors to establish a perspectivist theory of representation (in *The Perception of the Visual World*). After analyzing all these books and benefiting from the merits of these arguments, we still have a question in connection with visual arts, particularly painting: can studies of eyes or vision exhaust all the secrets of painting?

The eye is an important human organ, but it is by no means the only one. A more important fact is that this organ is a part of human body as a whole. What we do always exerts a strong influence on what we see. Therefore, we may ask a simple question: can painting also be studied from certain points of view other than perception? The comparison between painting and *go* may be one of the choices.

To sum up the points made in the preceding passages: It is evident that a *go* player and a painter should always keep different purposes in mind. In ancient China, there were many who were both *go* players and painters, but they were informed by a common sense that they must do different things with different attitudes and mental states. In making a painting, they know that a perceptual attitude is necessary, but a question may be raised as to whether a merely perceptual attitude towards painting is enough for them to understand painting.

2. Ancient Chinese sayings about the relationship between *go* and painting

However different painting is from *go*, many Chinese, from the Ming and Qing dynasties up to the modern period, were eager to link them. Probably it is because both painting and *go* playing were parts of their daily activities, and it is easy for an educated person to draw a connection between them. Before the establishing of contact with Western countries during modern periods, there was no such term as “Art” or “the fine arts” in China. The Chinese did not think that various forms of arts, such as poetry, painting, sculpture, architecture, music, dance, calligraphy, and drama, should be categorized into a special group of human activities in contrast to those done by, say, a goldsmith, a blacksmith, a printer, a ship-builder, a kite-and-umbrella- and fan-maker, etc. However, they did indeed put certain human activities into special groups. From the Zhou Dynasty (10th century B.C.) through the Confucius’s period (6th -5th century B.C.) to the collapse of the Han Dynasty (3rd century A.D.), there was an idea of poetry, music and dance sharing the same origin. This way of grouping arts was for religious and political purposes, and thus poetry, music and dance can be named together as the “ritual arts”. Since then Chinese social order underwent many transformations. From that time to the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) periods, a new group came to be formed which consists of *qin* (an instrument like zither in the West), *go*, calligraphy, and painting. This is a quite different group from that in the Confucius’s and Han period. No particular name or term was given to that group then, but, since all the four activities show graceful life styles of the *literati*, it may be said that they are the “arts” of the educated, or they may be designated as the

“graceful arts”.³⁾ It might be unusual to the Europeans that *go* is included into such a group of “arts”, but in the minds of those “educated” people or *literati*, *go* and other arts were only parts of their daily life. To them, it was not yet necessary to form a concept of “arts” to exclude *go* while including sculpture and architecture. It seemed to them that the latter required physical labor, which should not be done by them as members of polite society.

Before I get down to detailed analysis, I would like first to give certain samples of their remarks. This is a way to show that what I am going to do is only to interpret the ideas of the ancient Chinese rather than to invent new ideas of my own.

Jieziyuan Huazhuan, a guidebook for painting learners edited around 1700, says:

When painting flowers, whether to paint with meticulous brushwork or to draw a free sketch, one should make strokes as positioning the stones in *go*. In both painting and *go* one must first race for *shi* and thereby attain a vivid and dynamic atmosphere so as to avoid being rigid.⁴⁾

Here the author states that the making of a painting is like the playing of *go*; the first and the most important is to acquire *shi* 勢. *Shi* is a special Chinese word that has several meanings, such as momentum, initiative, or situation.

Zhang Shi wrote in around 1830 the following:

To arrange the composition of a painting is similar to laying stones in *go* playing. One can lay stones on every cross-point of the grid, but one cannot lay them indiscriminately; a painter can put ink everywhere on the paper, but he cannot do so arbitrarily. Goplaying has its own way and painting has its own principles. In *go* playing, even if only a single stone is laid in the wrong place, the whole situation will be destroyed. A painting contains a certain principle even though there are no definite positions marking the relationships between the upper, middle, and lower parts.⁵⁾

Shen Zongqian completed his famous work *Jiezhou Xuehuabian* in 1781, in which he wrote:

The principle of painting is very similar to that of *go* playing. Low-level players fiercely fight in a single corner over only a small area and lose the much larger areas in the overall situation. When grand masters play, they hardly fight, but they never make concessions. From beginning to end, there are no idle stones. Inspired by *go* playing, we may recognize the principles of painting. Although painting is done by a single person, it is similar to *go*

- 3) I gave a detailed discussion of this two concepts in connection with the fine arts in ancient China in a paper “Elitist Tendency in Chinese Painting”, which was included in my book *The Secrets of Chinese Painting*, Hong Kong: The Cosmos, 1996.
- 4) Wang Gai et al., *Jieziyuan Huazhuan*, Quoted from Yu Jianhua, *Zhongguo Hua Lun Lei Bian*, Zhonghua Shuju, 1973, pp. 1104 – 1105; author’s translation.
- 5) Zhang Shi, *Huatan*, in Yu, pp. 988 – 989; author’s translation.

playing in respect to winning and losing.⁶⁾

The above two paragraphs demonstrated that, in addition to race for *shi* or the situation so as to create a “vivid and dynamic atmosphere,” a painter should also grasp two points: first, to know the principles of painting, and second, to have an opponent in mind. These two points are actually connected with each other: the principles of painting depend on the consciousness of the opponent. A painter makes a painting alone, and he draws every stroke at will, but he should act as if an opponent were sitting in front of him. In the *go* playing, a small mistake will bring about the loss of the whole game because it is a competition with a rival, who will take advantage of this mistake. Such a sense of an opponent also means a sense of order or sequence. A correct order of laying stones will make sure of a victory, while the wrong order results in giving an opponent the opportunity to race for the strategic points. A comparison with the *go* implies that it also needs an order to make a good painting, a point that deserves a detailed discussion later in this paper.

Zhang Feng, a painter in the transitional period between the Ming and Qing dynasties, wrote in his *Tanyilu* in c. 1640:

A good *go* player arranges stones naturally and gracefully, making a feint to the east but attacking in the west, and then gradually tackling the details, thus taking the initiative at every stage of the game. This shows the player's ability to stay relaxed. A good painter should also be able to stay relaxed. At first he makes a loose overall arrangement, then dots and dyes ink, layer upon layer to make it look profound and lovely, thus providing a lively feeling.⁷⁾

Sheng Dashi, another painter and art critic in the Qing Dynasty, wrote in his *Xishan Wuyou Lu* in c. 1810:

In painting, one must begin with a few strokes to form the general situation. This is exactly like *go* playing. If the player concentrates on only a single corner, he can occupy a small territory but will lose the match. Nevertheless, [the scenes] in a painting should not just be knocked together either. When designing the whole, one must first arrange the positions of mountains and the directions of the trees. A good *go* player can decide the situation of the whole match with only a few stones. A good painter must be able to do so, too. After that, he gradually adds shades and dye tinctures, from thin to dense and from light to dark, completing a perfect composition.⁸⁾

Some interesting ideas are expressed in these two paragraphs, such as to “stay relaxed,” not to “concentrate on a single corner,” and not to “knock scenes together”. All this demonstrates

6) Shen Zongqian, *Jiezhou Xuehuabian*, in Yu, p. 867; author's translation.

7) Zhang Feng, *Tanyilu*, in Yu, p. 141; author's translation.

8) Sheng Dashi, *Xishan Woyoulu*, in Huang and Deng, *Meishu Congshu*, p. 1337; also in Yu, p. 267, author's translation.

their ideas on art, and deserves to be carefully studied. More importantly, however, the authors express a notion of stages in painting. In playing *go*, the player should first try to occupy certain key points, and thus to form the general situation as well as his own battle arrays; then, in the next stage, he tries to break through the opponent's arrays or to protect his own ones; in the end, he comes to clear the "public points," i.e. trying to get a larger share of the left interspace between himself and the opponent. In light of this idea, a painter should not only make a painting in order, but in stages. He cannot paint by putting one part after another; rather he has to put one layer after another, which means that he has to first arrange general positions, then provide actual forms, and eventually deal with the details.

Huang Binhong (1865-1955), a famous modern painter, writes:

I also take painting as *go* playing. A *go* player should be good at making traps [or eyes]. With more traps, one can win. Trap is equal to void in painting. Dong Yuan and Ju Ran became masters for endless generations only because they got the secrets of balancing void and solid. The Four Masters at the end of the Yuan Dynasty (referring to Huang Gongwang, Wang Meng, Ni Zan, and Wu Zheng) transformed the solid to the void, but there was solid in the very void. Ni Zan tried to express solid with void; what an excellent painter he was!⁹⁾

Huang Binhong links the issue of solid and void in painting with eyes or traps in the *go*, so as to stress the issue of life and death. This is also a key point for the analogy.

3. The general situation and the playing attitude

The comparison between *go* and painting may be one of the clues for us to find ways of interpreting painting in addition to those based on perceptual attitude. In fact, Chinese painting style underwent a great transformation from the tenth century onward, and the perceptual attitude is no longer enough to offer a good and comprehensive explanation of it.

In contrast to Lu Ji and Yan Yanzhi's definitions of painting outlined above, Jing Hao (ca. 870-930) tried to make a distinction between the appearance and the truth, and warned painters against taking appearance as the truth. He challenged the traditional view of the form-likeness in the following statement: "painting is to paint."¹⁰⁾ To him, a painting is not necessarily an imitation of appearance, but a subjective creation made by the *movements* of the mind, body, and hand of the painter, in which the action "to paint" is emphasized. Or, in his words, "to collect the wonderful [elements] and create truth."¹¹⁾ Jing Hao was one of those who promoted

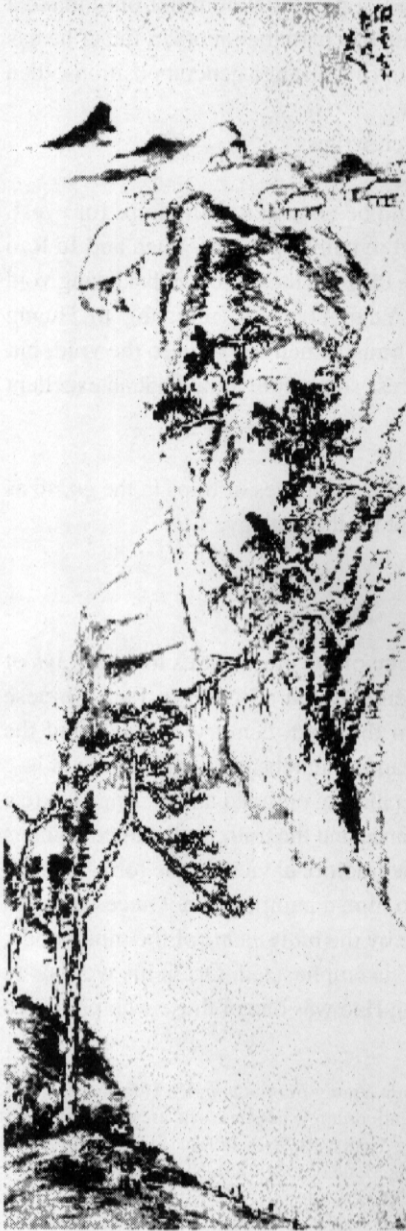
9) Huang Binhong: "Letter to Wang Boming, 1948." Quoted from *Huang Binhong on Art*, Henan Arts Press, 1998, p. 130, author's translation. In this paragraph, Huang mentions a few persons, who are among the most important painters in ancient China. Here is a list of them: Dong Yuan (?-ca.962), Ju Ran (living in the second half of the 10th century), Huang Gongwang (1269-1354), Wang Meng (1308-1385), Ni Zan (1301/06-1374), and Wu Zhen (1280-1354).

10) In Chinese, 畫者畫也. See Jing Hao's *A Note on the Art of the Brush*. See Yu, p. 605, author's translation.

11) More discussions on Jing Hao's view can be seen in Jianping Gao, *The Expressive Act in Chinese Art: From Calligraphy to Painting* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1996), pp. 138-141.

transformational style in Chinese painting, and after him, the painter's mind and brushwork played a more significant role, in addition to perception.

This transition deserves a detailed discussion in one or more full-length books, but here, a comparison with *go* may shed some light on it.



(Picture 3)

To make a painting, indeed, to make every artwork or even every human product, one must first have a general plan in mind before starting the work. The painting theories built on the basis of perceptual attitude require that a painter have a general plan of what is going to be painted, and so do the players of *go*; but these two kinds of plans have to be realized in completely different ways. A painter arranges the elements of his painting in accordance with his own intention, so as to form a general image of what is going to be painted, but, in the final analysis, his intention is decided by his perception, and he always has to compare what he paints with what he sees. His work is also supposed to be judged in this way. On the other hand, the *go* player is supposed to compete with an opponent, and every move made by him causes a counter move. Therefore, when a *go* player talks about a plan and a general situation, he has to take the moves of the opponent into consideration. He shall race to certain strategic points, take initiatives, and control the general development of the match, but what shapes his stones will eventually form are not so important. (See Picture 3)

By comparing painting with *go*, the idea of a general plan in Chinese painting was changed. Just as the aforementioned critics wrote, in painting "one must begin with a few strokes to form the general situation," rather than concentrating on a single corner." The general plan for painting is thus no longer the arrangement of the pictorial elements and their positions in the whole picture, but the painter's strategy and its realization during the process of making a painting. This is a new attitude

towards painting, which can be designated as *playing attitude*.

A perceptual attitude towards painting may allow one to perceive the “general situation” as a “structural skeleton” (Arnheim), or “schema” (Gombrich), but in a playing attitude a painter regards the “general situation” as a preparation for further development of his painting, as in the deployment for a battle. In this sense, a painter should first try to take initiative under the guidance of a general strategy in order to form a general situation for further struggle with brushwork.

4. The form and momentum in *go* and painting

To continue the comparison of painting and *go*, I would like to get to detailed discussion of two terms: *xing* 形 or form, and *shi* 勢 or momentum, both of which are widely used in painting criticism and *go* comments. What I intend to do is to show how the meanings of the two terms were transformed due to their being borrowed from one field to another.

Xing is now translated as “form” in English in most cases, but since the meaning of “form” is so ambiguous in western languages, particularly since it implies a Platonic derivation of the idea or essence of objects, we have to avoid this translation at the very beginning. In the history of the Chinese language, the earliest meanings of *xing* are the appearance or facial features, the figure of human body, and the shape of an object¹². All of these are convenient for pictorial representation, and thus are regarded as the painter’s responsibility to represent them. As the above quoted remarks made by Lu Ji and Yan Yanzhi, Chinese painters indeed once accepted it as a simple fact that painting was an art to show the *xing* of the object, in contrast to other kinds of signs made by mankind, which were supposed to represent the knowledge and idea of an object.

When the term *xing* was brought into *go*, and applied to the discussion of the *xing* of the groups of stones and their relationship, however, it gained a new meaning. A good *xing* in a *go* game does not mean it looks nice in the ordinary sense; it refers neither to pretty human bodies nor to impressive landscapes. The *xing* of facial features, the figures of human body, the shapes of an object, and even the scenes of a landscape, all this can be seen from a static point of view; in this case *xing* keeps its meaning of appearance. On the other hand, good *xing* in *go* should be taken as a group of stones which are easy to live (to make traps), to defend themselves in an effective way, to spread themselves with plenty of potentialities, and not to make forces repeat themselves or be cumbersome, etc. It is by no means the appearance of a static mass of things.

In order to understand the *xing* in *go*, we must, first of all, know what this game is, get used to its rules, and train the sense of *xing* through frequent practice. Only when one is good at *go* playing can one understand what the *xing* means, and judge if a *xing* is good. Therefore, the

12) *Xing* was already widely used in the pre-Qin period (before 221 B.C.) in the sense of *what was seen in general*, but the first meaning of the word was probably the shapes of creatures on the basis that the right part of *xing* (形) refers to hairs. In the “Appended Remarks” of the *Book of Changes*, there is a well-known sentence: “In the heavens, forms (heavenly bodies) appear and on earth shapes (creatures) occur. In them change and transformation can be seen.” (English translation quoted from *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, Wing-tsit Chan ed. & trans. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963, p. 265). The *xing* was translated as shapes here.

xing is understood in a dynamic way, and judged from the internal process of game itself. In this sense, probably it is still good to translate *xing* as form, in which, nevertheless, a generative connotation was retained: to form the shapes in accordance with the rules of the game.

A good *go* player always has *xing* or form in mind, and tries to make good form in order to avoid a foolish one. There are even the so-called “*go* aestheticians” who would rather lose a match than let their stones to be in a bad form. In their minds, the records of their matches would be published for people to read and even kept for future generations as works of art; a bad form will damage their reputations because it would be regarded as “too practical” without any sense of “beauty.” Because of this, people might say that *go* is an art in that it pursues “beauty.” My concern in this essay is not to discuss whether *go* is a form of art, but I would like to put forward two points here: 1. We have to take into account that no matter how “beautiful” forms are, the result of a match is not decided by the forms one achieves, but by the actual “territory” one occupies; 2. The criteria for the “aesthetic” judgment of forms are totally different from that of shape or appearance in the natural world. Beautiful or not, it is a judgment made on the basis of the game's rules. If one knows nothing of the game, one will be regarded as not qualified to evaluate its forms. What the “aestheticians” of *go* do is only to over-emphasize the sense of form originated from the game. They take them as independent, and temporarily forget the presumed end of the game.

The meaning of *xing* or form, together with the sense of “beauty” gained in *go*-playing, was transplanted back to painting in the Ming and Qing dynasties. Now *xing* was no longer the appearance of an objective world. Form was understood as a dynamic process, and its significance applied to all subsequent activities in making a painting. A new part of a form is often made out of the necessities of the parts already in existence, as well as out of its strategic function in the next stage of form-making or forming.

Similar things happened to another term *shi* with slight differences. On the one hand, the earliest meaning for *shi* is something to do with force or in the Chinese character 力, as the lower part of the character 勢 shows. In this sense, it reminds us of a Western term: sublime. It can have reference to things mathematical in terms of huge size, or to dynamic something with irresistible forces.¹³⁾ Like sublime, *shi* as a term can refer both to nature and to art. When one states that a work of art has *shi* or *qi-shi* (*qi* is another important term which I cannot discuss in this context), one means either it has colossal size or it shows a powerful force.

On the other hand, *shi* was used to refer to certain special kinds of forces from a very early time. For instance, it can be referred to as the power of a monarch or official, to military strategy of a general, and to social position or geographical situation one occupies, in short, something by means of which one can be superior to the others.

A further development of the *shi* is to let its meaning be “objectified” and thus to regard it

13) Here I refer to the distinction made by Immanuel Kant in *The Critique of Judgement*.

as a social and natural tendency about which people as individuals can do nothing but follow.

In literary criticism, *shi* as a subjective connotation of strength, and the objective connotation of tendency was mixed. There is a chapter entitled “Forming *shi*” in the famous *Wenxing Diaolong* (*The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, a book particularly dealing with principles of the literary criticism completed in ca. 500 A.D.), which means to follow the style that a literary form required, rather than to be soft or unusual. Still, by doing so, the work can gain certain strength.

A new way of combination of the subjective and objective connotation of the *shi* can be seen in two human activities: calligraphy and *go*. The influence of calligraphy on painting is very important and should be discussed on another occasion. In this context, I can only summarize this idea by stating that the *shi* in calligraphy represents a challenge to geometrical forms through free movements of hand and body in character writing.¹⁴⁾

In *go* playing, the player should try to “attain a vivid and dynamic atmosphere” through “racing for *shi*”.¹⁵⁾ This *shi* is not a size or a force, nor is it a natural tendency already there, but something that is produced by an individual with an effort and thereby achieves a general situation for potential development of the game. A *go* player is supposed to create a *shi* in the process of laying one stone at a time in turn; in this way he can let the game develop to his advantage. As a term for *go*, *shi* often means certain strategic points a player occupies that will influence the process of the game, in contrast to the actual territory a player already owns in corners.

By returning to the remarks made by the Chinese painting critics as quoted above, the analogy to *go* strengthens the consciousness of the process. In painting, *shi* is no longer associated with the sublime notion of a painting (as an artwork) or with what a painting depicts (in nature). Rather, it has become a concept in connection with the strategy in making the painting. This concept is now usually translated as momentum. This translation is, of course, not able to exhaust the meanings of *shi* as a term in *go* and painting. Perhaps a better way is to keep the original word *shi*, though Prof. Rudolf Arnheim criticizes me for doing that.¹⁶⁾

5. Void, order and stages

As I quoted in chapter 2, Huang Binhong, a well-known Chinese painter in first half of 20th century, linked painting with the play of *go* because both are matters of life-and-death. A group of stones with at least two eyes (like a living creature) is called alive, while less than two will be called dead. By comparing painting with *go*, Huang stresses the balance of the void and the solid in painting.

14) More on this topic please see Jianping Gao, *The Expressive Act in Chinese Art: From Calligraphy to Painting* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1996), pp. 93-103.

15) Wang Gai et al., *Jieziyuan Huazhuan*, Quoted from Yu Jianhua, *Zhongguo Hua Lun Lei Bian*, Zhonghua Shuju, 1973, pp. 1104 - 1105; author's translation. See also Note 4.

16) See Rudolf Arnheim's review on the book *The Expressive Act in Chinese Art*, in *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, Volume 38, Number 3, July 1998.

The relationship between solid and void is an ancient and traditional topic for painting criticism, and critics have offered numerous different opinions about it. Chinese painters like to leave large empty spaces in paintings so that the audience may fill them by using their own imagination. This is a challenging fact to theorists who aim to offer an explanation. In order to show why Chinese painting is different in this aspect from their Western counterparts, many scholars resort to Taoism. According to Taoism, Tao or “the Way” is void, and it logically comes ahead of everything in the world.¹⁷⁾ This is the cosmological way of forming a metaphysics of the world. It maintains that the world originated from “the Way” or something “silent and void.” If this idea was borrowed from metaphysics to the field of painting criticism, then naturally the void shall come ahead of anything solid, but this may also imply that the images in painting exist because of empty space, which would be against Huang’s experience of painting. Huang repeatedly stressed that as a painter, one should be “from solid to void, first to be able to paint full paper, and then seek to reach void.”¹⁸⁾ He did not need metaphysics to justify his view on void, but tried to find an analogy more accurately to describe his experience. By comparing painting with *go*, Huang reversed the relationship of solid and void, and put solid ahead of void. In his mind, the void or empty space is not like “the Way” in metaphysics, but like the empty points in *go*. A group of stones become alive because of empty points, but, reciprocally, it is the very solid stones that enclose these points. By bringing such an idea to painting, Huang presented a much more practical explanation of the relationship between solid and void.

In addition to life-and-death in *go*, there are many more issues which attract the attention of the players. In *go*, one of the most important techniques is the order or sequence of laying stones. To a player, the sense of order seems to be a higher knowledge than the life-and-death, which is seen as a basic one. A low-level player usually concentrates on the issue of life-or-death; he either constantly worries about his stones being killed by his opponent, or the attempts to kill those of his opponent’s. Therefore, they tend to focus on a part, just as Shen Zongqian put it, “Low-level players fiercely fight in a single corner over only a small area and lose the much larger areas in the general situation.”¹⁹⁾ A master player, though still keeping an

17) Here is a paragraph from *Tao Te Ching*:

There is a thing confusedly formed,
Born before heaven and earth.
Silent and void
It stands alone and does not change,
Goes round and does not weary.
It is capable of being the mother of the world.
I know not its name
So I style it “the way”.

Tao Te Ching, Chapter 25. English translation quoted from D. C. Lau translation, Penguin Books, 1963, p.30.

18) Huang Binhong, “preface to the book of my own small landscape paintings, 1953.” Quoted from *Huang Binhong on Art*, Henan Arts Press, 1998, p. 129, author’s translation.

19) Shen Zongqian, *Jie-zhou Xuehuabian*, in Yu, p. 867; author’s translation. See also Note 6.

eye on the life-and-death issue, aims at the victory of the entire game, namely, to occupy the most territory. He knows that what is more crucial is to locate and race to the commanding points, thereby taking the initiative for the whole game. If he does not find and occupy the key points in time, his opponent will probably take them before him. In *go* playing, each of the two players lays one stone at a time in turn. A player must always think about where his opponent will lay his stones in future moves and the more moves in advance he can calculate, the better a player he is. This naturally gives rise to a sense of order for laying stones. *Go*-playing manuals and records usually picture certain numbers within the small circles that indicate stones in order to show the sequence of laying stones (See again Picture 2). Every step is but one choice among many possibilities, and it in turn opens up new opportunities. If the player is a master, every choice must be a reasonable one, that is, the result of a particular situation. There are, therefore, causal relations between the stones on the grid and a player can only realize his strategic intention by following the correct sequence. If he neglects this sequence even for a single move, the whole game will probably develop on another track and the result will be entirely different from the one he has predicted.

By comparing painting to *go*, the ancient Chinese emphasized the importance of order or sequence in brushwork. A painter is now supposed to make every new stroke in accordance with the situation he is in. When he is painting, there is, of course, no opponent sitting on the other side of the paper or silk and working on the same picture with him. And yet a Chinese painter should always keep a sense of competition in mind. As a stone is to be laid on the grid, every stroke is to be made at the right place and time, following the inclination of the preceding strokes and preparing for the strokes to come, striving to take the initiative. To make a stroke is always a choice, which is decided or influenced by the size and shape of the paper, the motif and purpose of painting, and above all by the strokes which have already been made on the paper and thus have formed the general situation and momentum.

Stroke making is, therefore, like a stone laid in *go* playing in that it is a reaction or a counter-measure to the situation. Li Gan, a painter in the 14th century, wrote: "In making a new stroke, one must see the inclination of the previous one. If [the inclination] is continued without a break, a sense of connection will naturally arise."²⁰ An even better presentation of this idea was made by Shen Zongqian in the 18th century as *bi-bi-xiangsheng* (筆筆相生 strokes generate with each other).²¹ Every new stroke is a creative reaction to the present situation, as well as guided by the strategy of the painter. There are "theories of game" in many different fields such as mathematics and linguistics; this may also be called a "theory of game". In this theory, a counter-measure results from aesthetic feeling, which is an outcome of experiences accumulated through longtime practice. In the light of such a parallel, we get a deeper understanding of the concept of sequence in Chinese painting. Sequence in painting is not as,

20) Li Gao, Zhupu, in Huang Binhong and Deng Shi, comp., *Meishi Congshu* (Naijing: Jiangsu Guji Chubanshe, 1986), p. 973; author's translation.

21) Shen Zongqian, *Jiezhou Xuehuabian*, in Yu, p. 532.

for example, first planting trees in the front of a house and then in the back of it, or first ploughing the land to the west of a village and then the east. A stroke in painting is the result of the preceding strokes, but it is also a cause of the next, and thus a causal chain is formed in which every stroke is a link.

A match of *go* is usually divided into several phases in which different tactics are adopted: the beginning, when the player is to have the whole grid in mind and try to occupy key positions in order to form a general situation; the middle, when he is to fight with an opponent in order to defend his territory and break into the opponent's territory; and the end, when he is to try to get a bigger share in dividing the remaining intermediate zones. Ancient Chinese painters, as quoted above, expressed similar ideas about the procedure of painting. A painter should begin with a few strokes to form a general structure rather than concentrate on a corner. It is only after the general structure has been formed that a painter can get down to the details. "At first he [a painter] makes a loose overall arrangement; he then dots and dyes ink layer upon layer to make it look profound and lovely, thus providing a lively feeling."²²⁾ "A good *go* player can decide the situation of the whole match with only a few stones. A good painter must be able to do so, too. After that, he gradually adds shades and tinctures, from thin to dense and from light to dark, completing a perfect composition."²³⁾ In their minds, a painting should not be painted one part after another, but one layer after another. In different phases, the painter does different kinds of work.

6. A special development from the expression theory

Some Chinese art critics prefer to differentiate traditional Chinese art from its Western counterpart by arguing that the former is expressive while the latter is imitative.²⁴⁾ This is of course a too simplified distinction, since there are many expression theories in the West and many imitative ideas in ancient China. But if we summarize the main features of art in China and Europe, we may find that the subjective currents in art indeed appeared much earlier in China (in painting criticism, the tenth century, but much earlier in poetics) than in the West, where art theories and criticism were mainly under the influence of imitation theories until the appearance of the Romanticism and Idealism in the 19th century. The expression theories were elaborated as independent aesthetic theories as late as the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries by the works of Benedetto Croce and R. G. Collingwood.

The imitative theories stress the relationship between artwork and the objective world while expression theories direct their focus on the relationship between artwork and the creator of the work. In this sense, many ancient Chinese ideas on art may indeed be categorized as expressive

22) Zhang Feng, *Taiyilu*, in Yu, p. 141. See Note 7.

23) Sheng Dashi, *Xishan Woyoulu*, in Huang and Deng, *Meishu Congshu*, p. 1337. See Note 8.

24) Yu-kung Kao made an interesting distinction between the lyric aesthetics and narrative aesthetics, and considered that the Chinese aesthetics was mainly on the side of the former. See Yu-kung Kao, "Chinese Lyric Aesthetics", in Alfreda Murck and Wen C. Fong eds., *Words and Images, Chinese Poetry, Calligraphy, and Painting*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) pp.47-90.

ones. However, this does not mean that the purpose of painting for them was to vent strong emotions (Romanticists), or to communicate the emotions one felt to others (Leo Tolstoy). To make an artwork, one indeed needs to be in certain special mental states, but they may not necessarily be the feelings one cannot restrain from releasing, nor is artwork meant to convey one's emotions to others.

Moreover, painting is not something designed by a painter to arouse an emotion on the part of audience while the painter himself does not necessarily feel it, either. This is an opinion held by many modern theorists (for example, Stephen Davies, Peter Kivy, etc.), but no signs of it can be found in ancient Chinese art criticism. Ancient Chinese repeatedly stressed that they made painting for self-amusement, or we may say, art for the artist's sake. The pleasures they felt during the process of making paintings and seeing their own works afterwards were given primary importance. Naturally, many ancient Chinese painters might actually paint for the sake of audience, but a theoretical framework prevented them to claim that. It was impossible for them to presume that they could arouse emotions they had not felt themselves, because to them that would be equal to insincerity, which was against their very idea of art.

Again, the analogy with *go* throws light on this issue. During the process of making a painting, a painter enters into a mental state as playing a game. In such a state, one does not think about one's own emotion and endeavors to demonstrate it, or to think about the responses of his audience. In short, one does not play in accordance with their feelings. An athlete or a player of *go* concentrates on the competition itself rather than his or her own feeling or that of the audience, and so does a painter in making a painting. The process of making a painting is a series of free movements of a painter's mind and body. If one maintains that it is still a kind of expression theory, then what is stressed is neither the beginning (the emotion to be expressed) nor the end (the audience's emotional response), but the middle, which consists of a series of actions accomplished in a particular mental state.

The Chinese often describe the quality of art with a term: true. A good art ought to be a true one, but what is "true"? In light of an imitation theory or a perceptual attitude, it is interpreted as true to the objective world, while an expression theory demands that art be true to the "heart" or emotions of the creator. The analogy to *go* and the playing attitude enables us to understand the true as *being oneself*, and as concentrating on what one is doing. It is no longer to "press out" (as the word "express" literally means) something from inside of the creator, but to do something with a state of mind as it should be in this context.

By drawing parallel to *go*, a painter's mental state can be defined as neither an active nor a passive one. An expression theory may place stress on the active role of the artist in making an artwork, while an imitative theory tends to demand that a painter follow what he has seen. In a game like *go*, one should be active but not arbitrary. A game has its own rules; one must struggle for freedom within the rules of the game. He cannot break the rules, for that will destroy the game, but he can show his freedom within the room provided by the rules, and explore new possibilities on the premise of these rules. When Chinese painters consider "painting is to paint" (Jing Hao's words, as quoted above), they take painting as a process, in which a painter follows the tendency exhibited by the strokes previously made, makes his

original creations in this particular situation, and paves the way for the following strokes. A painter might have general ideas or strategies about what he is going to make, but he does not have any ready-made schemata to be projected on to the paper. To a certain extent, a painter may let the painting form itself independently, but this does not mean to form the painting automatically. Every stroke of painting is a choice of the painter. A painter is not only to choose just once before the process of making a painting starts; he has to make a choice at every step of painting as well.

As a result, the appreciation of a painting is also somewhat like reading the record of a *go* game. Most of the audience, naturally, cannot be present when the painter is making a painting and thus see how he is working, but when they see the painting, as when they see the record of a *go* game, they can feel the process. They can feel that the painter tries hard to fight against a non-existent opponent, makes an innovative stroke like laying a bold stone, and deals with the details like occupying the remaining intermediate points at the last stage of a *go* game. This idea may remind us of Norman Bryson's *Vision and Painting*, in which he tries to argue that there is an "invisible body" in Chinese painting, i.e., from Chinese painting, he can see the gestures of the painter's hand.²⁵⁾ A comparison with *go* can show more than what he said. Bryson only brings to our attention that there are movements of body (gestures and postures) behind a static picture. This is important, but is still not enough. We have to demonstrate how the body is moving, what kind of rules the body follows, and why it is so. *Go* practice and game theory can provide us many inspirations in this respect.

The comparison between Chinese notions of painting and expression theory may serve as a conclusive remark for this paper, because it shows the theoretical significance of analogy-drawing between *go* and painting. Finally, I would like to warn against another tendency, which is to take such an analogy too literally. Every analogy has its limitations. After all, *go* is not an art or something belongs to the group of the fine arts. On the other hand, as long as we aim to receive inspirations from such an analogy instead of taking it too literally, we have indeed made many interesting discoveries and will make many more in the future if we continue our studies along this line.

25) Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* (Macmillan, 1983), pp. 163-164, and many other places in the book.