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Moving Landscapes: on Movement as a Value in Medieval Chinese Aesthetics

17:30 p.m. on Wednesday, March 26, 2014
CEU–Faculty Tower #409
Budapest, V. Nádor u. 9.

Reception to follow!



In his *Theory of Garden Art*, H.C.C. Hirschfeld (1742-1792) argued for the superiority of the art of gardening to landscape painting on the grounds that it was in the former that movement was actually achieved and not merely “suggested.” This assertion of movement as a criterion of value was part of a new conception of the unity between the self and the natural world, and of the role of emotions in aesthetic experience. In traditional China, one finds traces of a similar discourse linking landscape, movement and feeling. This discourse was famously articulated in a statement by the famous Northern Song (960-1127) landscape painter, Guo Xi 郭熙 (c. 1020-1090), who wrote that the best landscapes were those suitable for “wandering and living” and that to view a painting of a mountain should “put one in a corresponding mood.” However, it was in medieval (220-589) accounts of poetry, music, painting and calligraphy that movement emerged as a core aesthetic value – as a quality of the artist’s activity, of the work of art, and of the experience of the perceiver. In my presentation I will discuss the implications of this aesthetics of movement for how thinkers and artists in medieval China conceptualized the self, the possibility of knowledge and the human capacity for personal agency and efficacious action in the world.

Curie Virág is an Assistant Professor in the department of East Asian Studies at the University of Toronto and a Humanities Initiative Fellow at the CEU Institute for Advanced Study. As an intellectual historian of early and medieval China, she is interested in the history and philosophy of ethics, self-cultivation, and aesthetics, and has dealt primarily with evolving conceptions of emotions, mind, intelligence and agency in pre-1200 philosophical, religious and literary texts. Her current book project is titled *Emotions in Medieval China*. Recent articles include “The Intelligence of Emotions? Debates over the Structure of Moral Life in Early China” (*L’Atelier du Centre de Recherches Historiques*, forthcoming), “Self-cultivation as *Praxis* in Song Neo-Confucianism” (John Lagerwey, ed., *Modern Chinese Religion. Value Systems in Transformation*, forthcoming 2014), and “Early Confucian Perspectives on Emotions” (Vincent Shen and Kwong-loi Shun eds., *Dao Companion to Classical Confucian Philosophy*, 2014).