

# New Rhyme of Chinese Modernization on the Silk Road: The Presentation of the Concept of Harmony between Human and Nature in Traditional Landscape Painting

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**ABSTRACT** This study examines how traditional Chinese landscape painting visually structures the concept of harmony between humanity and nature and discusses its relevance to Silk Road cultural exchange and contemporary Chinese modernization. It constructs an interpretive framework linking philosophical context with spatial organization, brushwork relations, and imagery structures. Based on this framework, the paper analyzes how the visual system of landscape painting operates historically and how it continues to function as a cultural resource within cross-cultural circulation. The study interprets spatial order, brush-and-ink rhythm, and imagery composition as structured visual carriers of human-nature relations rather than as simple reproductions of scenery. It further discusses Silk Road resonance through historically documented contacts between Chinese pictorial space concepts and the visual traditions of Central and Western Asia, rather than through purely formal analogy. The findings show that traditional landscape painting provides a stable visual logic for ecological thought, cultural continuity, and contemporary design philosophy, offering interpretive reference for Chinese modernization and cross-cultural visual communication.

**INDEX TERMS** human-nature harmony, chinese landscape painting, visual representation, silk road, chinese modernization

## I. INTRODUCTION

**A** LONGSIDE the growth of the 'Belt and Road Initiative', the reinvigoration of the 'Silk Road' arts through the 'Belt and Road Initiative' is providing a new historical context for the development of the artistic heritage of China. Traditional Chinese landscape painting has expressed the human/nature connection in a concentrated visual form [1,2]. The long standing interpretation of traditional landscape painting, through its aesthetic values, can contribute to establishing a contemporary ecological/cultural discourse system with Chinese characteristics [3,4]. This exploration of the visual lineage of landscape art can connect the modern development needs of the country to its traditional ecological wisdom.

The current research faces a dual dilemma in translating the ecological concepts contained in landscape paintings into modern contexts. On the one hand, the interpretation of ideas often remains at the level of philosophical generalization and style description, lacking a systematic theoretical model that binds them to the specific visual structure of the

image [5,6]. On the other hand, research is often limited to the painting itself, failing to fully place the visual lineage in the cross-cultural circulation context represented by the Silk Road, making it difficult to reveal its cultural vitality in the perspective of the Silk Road New Rhyme [7,8].

Previous studies have attempted to approach this issue through various pathways. The study of philosophy and aesthetics provides a source of thought for ideas, and the formal analysis of art history reveals some visual laws [9]. These methods have advanced understanding from the perspectives of ideology, form, and application. However, its research presents a fragmented state and fails to organically connect the philosophical connotations, visual presentation rules, and cross media transformation mechanisms of ideas within an integrated framework [10]. This has led to insufficient interpretation of the aesthetic role and new rhyme of traditional wisdom in the cross-cultural context of the Silk Road, and the lack of an analytical framework that integrates philosophical connotation, visual presentation and historical circulation context. It is difficult to systematically reveal its

internal logic as a cultural resource in the context of Chinese path to modernization.

To address these issues, this study establishes an analytical path that links philosophical foundations, visual structure, and historical context. It first defines an interpretive framework that sets clear conceptual boundaries for reading landscape painting. It then examines spatial organization, brushwork systems, and imagery structures to clarify how visual form carries ideas of human–nature relations. Finally, these visual mechanisms are situated within the historical networks of the Silk Road and contemporary contexts, in order to evaluate their continuity and transformation as cultural resources in the process of Chinese modernization.

## II. DECODING PATH: CORE CONCEPTS AND RESEARCH METHODS

### A. PHILOSOPHICAL ORIGINS: THE IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF THE UNITY OF HEAVEN AND MAN AND THE WAY OF NATURE

This study is based on the holistic understanding of the relationship between humans and nature in traditional Chinese philosophy, and provides theoretical origins and methodological definitions for the concept of "harmonious coexistence between humans and nature". Confucianism takes the unity of heaven and man as its philosophical core, viewing nature as a whole with moral and orderly significance, and incorporating human behavior into the norms of the operation of heaven and earth [11]. The Taoist philosophy is based on the principle of following the Tao and nature, understanding nature as a spontaneously generated and constantly circulating life system, and limiting human existence to conforming to its internal laws [12]. Traditional Confucianism and Taoism do not constitute a unified system without tension in their views of nature. Confucianism takes the Way of Heaven as the root of ethical order, understanding nature as a cosmic structure that can be moralized and standardized, placing humanity at the center of responsibility and the realization of order. Taoism, on the other hand, views nature as a self-generating and self-transforming life process, emphasizing a de-willed mode of existence and downplaying the dominant role of human purpose in the universe. This difference means that their understandings of nature respectively point to normative structures and generative processes, and their theoretical orientations have long been in a state of dialogue, reconciliation, and reorganization throughout history. It is precisely this inherent tension that makes the traditional Chinese view of nature not a product of a single doctrine, but a complex structure formed through the continuous interaction of multiple ideological systems.

Based on the dynamic negotiation and historical reconfiguration between these ideas, this article defines landscape painting as a cultural form that carries cosmology and life philosophy through visual structures [13,14]. The natural images in the picture are not seen as the reproduction of objective scenery, but as the visual results of philosophi-

cal concepts transformed through brushwork, composition, and spatial organization. Therefore, harmonious coexistence does not exist as an abstract ethical proposition, but as a meaningful structure that can be recognized and interpreted in the picture. Within this study, meaning is not treated as a subjective projection detached from form, nor as a quantity to be calculated, but as a structured interpretive outcome that emerges from stable visual relations. Qualitative artistic concepts such as rhythm, vitality, or spiritual realm are approached through their consistent formal carriers in painting, including spatial hierarchy, brushwork movement, density relations, and narrative positioning. These visible structures provide the conditions through which conceptual meaning becomes identifiable and discussable. The analytical task of this paper is therefore not to translate artistic experience into numbers, but to clarify how specific visual organizations repeatedly generate certain ranges of meaning within a defined philosophical horizon.

In order to ensure the logical stability of the interpretation process, this paper constructs a meaning generation framework with context constraints as the core, and integrates the relationship between philosophy, visual presentation and cultural meaning into a unified model. The interpretive logic established by this theoretical framework also has fundamental universal significance for understanding the expression of natural views in other visual cultural forms and even contemporary design practices. This relationship is conceptually represented as:

$$S = \Phi(P|C) \quad (1)$$

In formula (1), S refers to the conceptual meaning generated in interpretation, P refers to the structured visual state of the painting as constituted by spatial organization, brushwork relations, and imagery arrangement, and C refers to the contextual horizon formed by Confucian and Taoist philosophy together with historical painting theories.  $\Phi$  designates the interpretive mechanism through which meaning emerges from visual structures under these contextual constraints. This model does not imply numerical measurement. It clarifies the logical path through which meaning is produced, ensuring that subsequent analysis remains grounded in observable visual relations and a stable philosophical framework. On this basis, the spatial, brushwork, and narrative analyses in Section Presenting Genealogy: Visual Dimensions and Contextual Interpretation of Ideas function as the concrete unfolding of P within this interpretive structure.

### B. FORMAL ANALYSIS: A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYZING THE VISUAL LANGUAGE OF LANDSCAPE PAINTING

Under the philosophical interpretation context constraints established in Section Philosophical Origins: The Ideological Foundation of the Unity of Heaven and Man and the Way of Nature, this article regards the visual language of

landscape painting as an intermediary system for generating ideas, and systematically disassembles and reconstructs the structure of the picture through a combination of formal analysis and image analysis [15].

$$P = \Psi(E, O) \quad (2)$$

In formula (2), E refers to the natural and cultural images that undertake the function of conveying meaning in the picture, O refers to the organization of these images in spatial layout, proportional relationships, brushwork movement, and virtual real rhythm, and  $\Psi$  refers to the visual integration mechanism revealed by formal analysis. This expression is used to clarify that the image is not a simple overlay of elements, but a holistic structure generated through organizational rules.

In the specific analysis process, the identification of visual elements is based on their stability in form and direction of meaning in the picture, while the analysis of organizational rules is based on the overall order formed by composition logic, spatial hierarchy, and brushwork movement [16,17].

On this basis, visual structure is further regarded as an intermediary layer connecting form and concept, ensuring that subsequent interpretation of meaning does not deviate from the facts of the picture. The formal system presented by P enters the process of meaning transformation under the contextual conditions defined in section Philosophical Origins: The Ideological Foundation of the Unity of Heaven and Man and the Way of Nature, and ultimately points to the conceptual connotation of "harmonious coexistence between humans and nature". This method establishes a continuous analytical path from visual structure to cultural meaning, ensuring that interpretation remains grounded in observable pictorial relations. This structured analytical approach is not only effective in painting research, but also has methodological reference value for interpreting the logical composition of patterns in terms of units, combinations, and rhythms. It provides a unified and stable formal basis for the development of different presentation dimensions in Section Presenting Genealogy: Visual Dimensions and Contextual Interpretation of Ideas.

### **C. CONTEXTUAL POSITIONING: SILK ROAD NEW RHYME AS A CROSS TEMPORAL PERSPECTIVE FOR INTERPRETATION**

On the basis of the aforementioned visual decoding methods, this article examines the concept of "harmonious coexistence between human and nature" in traditional landscape painting in a cross temporal and spatial context, in order to test the stability and scalability of this concept under different cultural flow conditions. The study regards the Silk Road as a long-standing cultural exchange structure, whose significance lies not in the dissemination of specific artistic styles, but in the continuous adjustment of natural views, cosmology, and aesthetic orientations in cross regional communication. In this context, the holistic view of nature

reflected in landscape painting is regarded as a highly generalized ideological form, whose core does not rely on specific media, but on value judgments of the relationship between humans and nature. Based on this understanding, this article limits cross contextual referencing to a parallel comparison mechanism between conceptual and formal layers in terms of methodology. The visual structure of traditional landscape painting, which has completed formal integration, is used as a benchmark form for conceptual expression, in contrast to the visual translation methods of similar natural views in contemporary art and design practices. The analysis does not trace the origin of the style, nor does it make similarity judgments at the image level, but focuses on the value orientation of whether the visual structure maintains consistency in the expression logic of natural order, spatial relationships, and human position under different historical conditions. In this perspective, the response and translation of traditional views of nature in contemporary art creation and design practice can become important fragments for observing the vitality and adaptability of ideas.

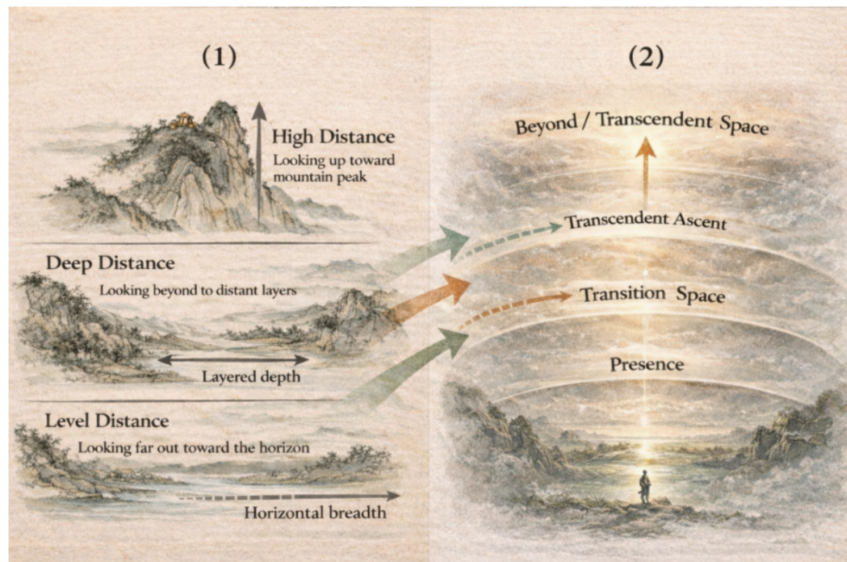
Through this reference method, the concept of "harmonious coexistence" in traditional landscape painting is understood as an open intellectual resource, whose meaning does not dissolve due to changes in media or era, but rather has the possibility of reorganization in new production conditions and aesthetic needs. This method enables research to go beyond the closed interpretation of a single historical context, incorporating the visual presentation of ideas into a continuously flowing cultural structure, thereby providing a stable and extensible analytical premise for the subsequent discussion of contemporary values.

## **III. PRESENTING GENEALOGY: VISUAL DIMENSIONS AND CONTEXTUAL INTERPRETATION OF IDEAS**

### **A. PRESENTATION OF SPACE: COSMIC PATTERNS AND THE ORDER OF HARMONY BETWEEN HEAVEN AND MAN**

In the process of studying the spatial concept of traditional landscape painting, it is necessary to sort out its internal structure through visualization in order to establish a corresponding relationship between painting language and philosophical ideas at the formal level. This section focuses on the analysis of representative spatial organization principles in landscape painting. By abstracting and refining classic composition methods, the overall order composed of viewpoint movement, spatial hierarchy, and viewing methods in painting is transformed into structured illustrations. At the same time, philosophical spatial patterns are introduced as references to present how artistic forms carry the understanding of the order of heaven and earth and the position of people. Under this approach, images are used as analytical media to demonstrate the isomorphic relationship between visual and intellectual structures, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 (1) integrates and presents the different viewing paths and spatial extension modes formed by high, deep, and flat distances ("Three Distances"), with the three distant



**FIGURE 1.** Composition of "Three Distances" in Landscape Painting and Schematic Diagram of Cosmic Space: (1) Composition of "Three Distances" in Landscape Painting; (2) Schematic Diagram of Cosmic Space

composition as the core. It shows that landscape painting does not rely on a single viewpoint, but establishes a flowing and open spatial experience through the continuous transformation of the line of sight in the vertical, depth, and horizontal directions. Figure 1 (2) responds to this painting structure with an abstract spatial hierarchy diagram, presenting a philosophical spatial order that logically corresponds to the three distant compositions through spatial progression from near to far and from present to transcendent. The correspondence between the two does not remain at the level of formal similarity, but stems from a common understanding of spatial integrity, that is, the multiple distant methods in painting guide viewers to complete the transition from reality perception to spiritual realm through the unfolding of visual levels. This mechanism enables the spatial composition of landscape painting to have the ability to carry thoughts on the relationship between heaven and man, thus confirming its inherent rationality as a visual expression of philosophical concepts.

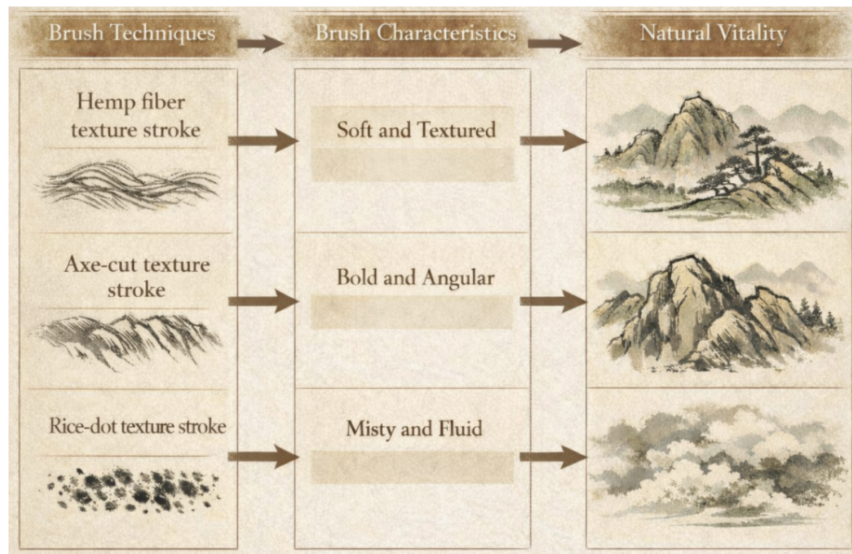
### **B. PRESENTATION OF BRUSH AND INK: THE RHYTHM OF LIFE AND THE NATURAL VITALITY OF TAOISM**

Under the framework of the formal system analysis method established in the previous section, this section further turns to the visual operation mechanism at the brush and ink level to examine how landscape painting transforms the material attributes of natural forms into a visual language with a life direction through brush stroke form and ink organization. Focusing on the operation of classic texturing techniques in images, this article analyzes the differential expressions of brush and ink in terms of movement trajectory, rhythm density, and form extension. These formal features are examined within the overall relationship of natural image generation, providing analytical references for understanding the intrinsic relationship between brush and

ink language and the concept of "Taoist philosophy". Based on this analysis path, the corresponding relationship between relevant brush and ink techniques and the natural sense of life is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 reveals that the language of brush and ink in landscape painting does not exist as an external means of shaping, but rather as a visual translation mechanism of natural order, by juxtaposing the formal characteristics of different brush and ink techniques with the natural life states they point to. The continuous and flexible linear movement of the linen texture constructs the growth rhythm of the mountain layering, and its form extension corresponds internally with the slow generation process of natural landforms, presenting a stable and lasting sense of life in the picture. Axe cut texture enhances the volume and force relationship of mountains and rocks through sharp and distinct brush strokes. The breaks and turns of the brush and ink visually establish the structural tension of natural objects, presenting a clear sense of material existence in the natural image. Rice dot texture relies on the overall organization of dot shaped ink and brush in the variation of density, weakening the specific boundaries of the form and making the visual space tend towards flow and dispersion, guiding viewers to perceive the elusive state of generation in natural operation. From this, it can be seen that different brush and ink techniques, through their respective stable formal logic, jointly constitute the visual lineage of natural life rhythm in landscape painting, and brush and ink themselves become the direct bearers of the concept of "Dao Fa Nature" in the painting.

The significance of this brushwork logic extends beyond the stylistic level. It establishes a visual approach that understands material structure as a life process, providing a traditional visual model for rethinking the relationship between humanity and matter, technology and nature in the



**FIGURE 2.** Schematic diagram of the correspondence between typical landscape painting brushwork techniques and natural sense of life

modern context. In the context of Chinese modernization, the rewriting of ecological order and material systems does not rely on symbolic transplantation, but rather on the reorganization of formal logic. The brushwork mechanisms of generation, bearing, and flow in landscape painting constitute a historical resource for transforming visual order into a cognitive framework.

### C. PRESENTATION OF IMAGERY: SYMBOLS OF IDEAL HABITAT AND HARMONIOUS COEXISTENCE

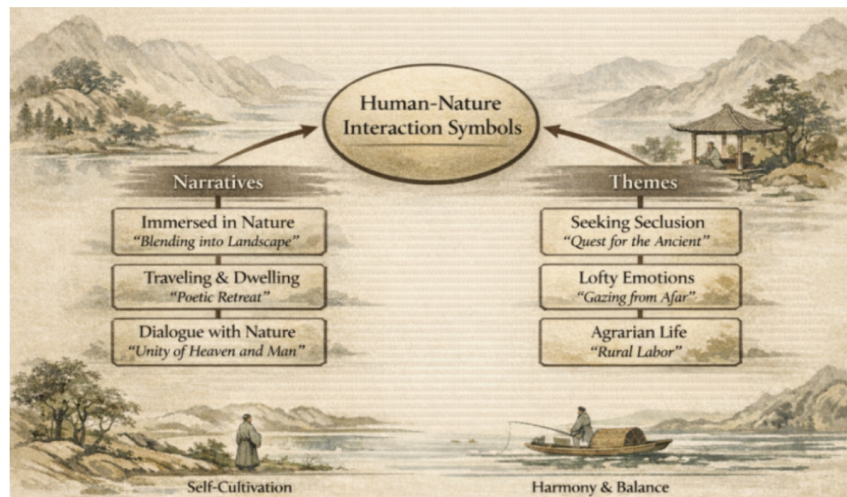
Under the constraints of the aforementioned methodological framework, this section further narrows down the analysis perspective from macro space and brushwork to the concrete and micro narrative level in the picture. Through a systematic review of the relationships between characters, architecture, and natural environment, it reveals how traditional landscape painting constructs stable and recognizable meaning structures within limited image elements. Relevant analysis no longer focuses on the symbolic meaning of a single image, but on the mutual reference of multiple symbols in the organization of the picture, in order to illustrate how the "human nature" relationship can be transformed into a perceptible visual order through narrative logic, and thus present an idealized state of existence and value orientation. Under this analytical path, the narrative hierarchy and thematic orientation are presented as a whole, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3 presents the bidirectional construction relationship between human activities and the natural environment in landscape painting by juxtaposing the "narrative structure" and "thematic type" within the same visual framework. On the one hand, the integration of characters into narrative styles such as landscapes, travel and dwelling, and dialogue with nature weakens the subjective scale of human beings, allowing their actions to be incorporated into the natural order, thereby visually dissolving the tension

between humans and the environment; On the other hand, the corresponding themes of reclusive pursuit, emotional attachment, and agricultural life respond to the setting of this spatial relationship from a spiritual and ethical perspective, making nature no longer just an aesthetic object. The internal resonance formed between narrative structure and theme type presents a stable and coherent meaning direction for the "human-nature" relationship in the picture, ultimately leading to "harmonious coexistence" as the core connotation of the ideal dwelling view in landscape painting.

### D. INTERPRETATION OF CONTEXT: FROM THE INFLUENCE OF THE SILK ROAD TO THE VALUE REBIRTH OF CHINESE PATH TO MODERNIZATION

Based on the analysis of the visual mechanism of traditional landscape painting's natural view in the previous section, this section further extends the research perspective to the Silk Road, a long-standing cross-cultural communication network. Historical records of mural painting, portable images, and material imagery circulating between Han-Tang China and Central Asia indicate that conceptions of cosmic order, landscape symbolism, and spatial narration were repeatedly negotiated in intercultural contexts. These contacts did not transmit Chinese landscape painting as a genre, but facilitated the circulation of cosmological schemata, spatial imagination, and human-nature relationships. By examining the juxtaposition of natural imagery and spatial concepts in different regional arts, this section sorts out the correlation structure and evolutionary path of natural views in the process of cross regional dissemination. Related analysis takes the common logic of artistic expression as a clue, comprehensively comparing the symbolic ways of natural images, the relationship between humans and the environment, and the value orientation of aesthetic orientation, in order to reveal how natural views form a continuous rather than



**FIGURE 3.** Schematic diagram of the narrative structure and theme types of the "human-nature" interactive symbol in landscape paintings

fragmented expression spectrum in multicultural interactions documented along the historical Silk Road networks.

Figure 4 presents the intrinsic relationship between Greek and Roman art, Central and West Asian art, and Chinese art in the expression of natural views, with spatial distribution and conceptual flow as dual axes. By focusing on the visual expression of nature in different cultural regions, Figure 4 does not construct civilizational typologies, but outlines distinct dominant orientations in the organization of human–nature relations. Western artistic traditions have long developed rigorous spatial systems and atmospheric modes of representation, while Chinese painting history also contains highly ordered compositional structures. The present comparison therefore does not operate at the level of stylistic form, but at the level of how visual systems tend to position nature in relation to human presence and cosmological meaning. Within this analytical frame, some Western traditions foreground nature as a structured spatial order articulated through rational construction, while Chinese landscape painting tends to organize space, imagery, and viewing paths into an integrated environment that connects physical scenery with moral cultivation and spiritual dwelling. These orientations are not mutually exclusive, but describe different dominant configurations through which natural views are visually stabilized. This difference does not stem from the art form itself, but is closely related to the cognitive framework of the relationship between humans and nature in their respective cultures. The communication channels formed along the Silk Road have caused structural resonance generated through long-term intercultural contact along Silk Road exchange routes of natural views through long-term interaction, transforming natural images from a single aesthetic object into a cross-cultural shared medium of meaning. Accordingly, the diagram should be read as a map of conceptual and structural tendencies rather than a classification of artistic traditions. Thus, Figure 4 reveals

that the exchange of Silk Road art is not simply a form of dissemination, but a process of continuous adjustment and reconstruction of natural concepts in multiple contexts.

On the basis of the previous discussion on the visual mechanism of traditional landscape painting's natural view and the cross contextual dissemination of the Silk Road, this section attempts to place this concept in the contemporary practical field for observation. Through the juxtaposition and examination of the presentation of natural views in different creative media, it tests the extension form of "harmonious coexistence between human and nature" as an ideological resource in the contemporary context. Based on the three levels of spatial creation, artistic intervention, and material design, representative contemporary practical images are selected to present the path of the transformation of natural views from painting visual structures to real environments, artistic actions, and daily material forms. This constructs an intuitive reference relationship between traditional concepts and contemporary creation, as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5 presents the structural common characteristics of natural views under different media conditions by juxtaposing three practical forms: architecture and landscape design, ecological art creation, and leather design. In Figure 5 (1), the natural terrain, water bodies, and human activity space form a continuous whole, reflecting that respect for environmental order stems from the continuation of the holistic spatial concept; In Figure 5 (2), the form of the work is attached to natural materials and environmental processes, and its generation logic points towards recognition of the laws of natural operation, thereby weakening the dominant position of human control in creation; In Figure 5 (3), the natural imagery is transformed from a concrete landscape to a language of patterns and materials, reflecting the shift of natural views from the aesthetic level to the ethical level of materials. Although these three practices are in different creative fields, they all point towards the relationship



**FIGURE 4.** Schematic diagram of the correlation structure between art and nature views along the Silk Road



**FIGURE 5.** Visual Translation Atlas of the Concept of "Harmonious Coexistence between Humans and Nature" in Contemporary Multidisciplinary Creation: (1) Architectural Landscape Case; (2) Ecological Art Case; (3) Leather Design Case

model of integrating human activities into natural systems in terms of value orientation, demonstrating the sustained effectiveness and cross media adaptability of the concept of "harmonious coexistence" in contemporary contexts.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that traditional Chinese landscape painting forms a coherent visual system through which the relationship between humanity and nature is articulated as spatial order, material rhythm, and narrative structure. The spatial organization of multiple distances constructs a visual framework that integrates viewing movement with cosmological orientation. Brushwork systems translate material form into rhythms of growth and transformation. Narrative relations among figures, architecture, and natural settings stabilize an ideal of dwelling that situates human life within a broader natural order. The analysis clarifies that philosophical ideas are not merely reflected but reorganized through visual operations, and that this reorganization constitutes the primary mechanism through which traditional ecological thought enters contemporary discourse. In contemporary context verification, the three

practical forms of architectural landscape, ecological art, and leather design present a consistent holistic natural view orientation, confirming the cross media extension ability of this visual system. The research results systematically clarify the internal structure of ecological wisdom in traditional landscape painting, providing a clear path for its theoretical transformation as a cultural resource of Chinese path to modernization. The research is still limited by the fact that the analysis objects mainly focus on the level of classical images, and the empirical sample coverage of contemporary practice is limited. Interdisciplinary quantitative verification is still insufficient. It is necessary for future research to deepen model validation in a wider range of design practices and cultural dissemination scenarios, and promote the sustained generation and application of traditional ecological aesthetics in contemporary social systems.

#### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

HU contributed this research and have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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