A Genealogical and Culture-historical Approach to the wayu 淹遊 Concept and Style in Korean Landscape Art

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abstract

Based on Korean garden landscape construction and landscape painting as well as artistic practices during the Joseon dynasty, the paper will examine how Korean scholars adapted the concept of wayu, derived from the Chinese word woyou, in their arts and rendered the space of “voyage in mind”. Especially, this essay will discuss how the idea’s reception and its artistic practice affected the lifestyle of Joseon-period literati, and in what way this adaptation is apparent on a visually aesthetic level. A genealogical and culture-historical approach to analysing the Korean reception of the wayu idea and its development in Korea will reveal the transformative process of adopting exogenous ideas, considered from an endogenous, art- and object-specific perspective.

According to scientific studies to date, the Chinese Nan-Bei period scholar Zong Bing 宗炳 (375-443) is generally regarded as the first scholar to use the term wayu (Chin. woyou) as an artistic practice and aesthetic approach to enjoying landscape painting, whereby viewers appreciate nature by wandering through the depicted landscape in their imagination. Zong Bing’s passion for ‘travelling in landscapes’, is recorded in the Woyoulu 卧游錄¹ (A Record of Travelling in the Mind while Lying down), composed by the Song philosopher Lü Zuqian 吕祖謙 (1137-1181) and in the Litai minghuaji 历代名畵記, juan 4, compiled by the Tang scholar Zhang Yanyuan 張彦遠 (ca 815-877). These two primary sources make it clear how he revered mountains and waters and travelled to far-off famous scenic areas like the peaks and mounts Lu 嘯, Heng 衛, Qing 荊, and Wu 巫. When he contemplated a mountain landscape, he always drew inspiration from other landscapes he had visited. And whenever he strolled amongst mountains and waters, he completely forgot about returning. One time, however, he was forced by illness to return to Jiangling and sighed:

Alas! Age and illness, both these causes have arrived at the same time. I'm afraid I will be unable to see all the famous mountains again. Hence, I wish to purify my mind, look at the dao, and travel in my imagination whilst lying down in my room.

嘆曰老疾俱至名山恐難徧睹唯澄懷觀道臥以游之²)

The essay Woyoulu further reveals how he realised the idea of “travelling in the imagination while lying down”. He covered the four walls of the room with
his own paintings of the landscapes he had visited and viewed them in order to continue to enjoy the beautiful sites. He would comment: "When I stir my zither, sometimes more reservedly, sometimes more vigorously, I want to set up an echo from all the mountains."3)

An Introduction to Landscape Painting *Hua shanshui xu* 畫山水序 by Zong Bing especially emphasized that he painted the landscapes himself and used a large variety of colours to depict the cloud-covered mountain tops. And he further describes how the paintings should represent the essence of nature; and reveal features like the gentle elegance of mountains and the spirit of deep valleys. Zong Bing also defines how enjoyment will arise when looking at the image according to *wayu*:

If the response of the eye and its congruence in the mind [to nature] is considered to be a universal law, when similitude is skillfully achieved, our eyes will also respond completely, and the mind be entirely in congruence. The response and congruence will affect the spirit and, as the spirit soars, inner essence will be reached.”

夫以應目會心為理者,類之成巧,則目亦同應,心亦俱會. 應會感神, 神超理得.5)

The delineation by Zong Bing and his aesthetic criticism of artworks as used for *wayu* (as well as the method of *wayu* and its expected impact), have been adapted in different ways and genre styles in Korean visual art, so that many of artworks reveal the term, sometimes in collaboration with poems and essays.6) This principal method of perceiving *wayu* is regarded as the conceptual foundation of Korean art during the Joseon dynasty.

The Zong Bing’s *wayu* had already been used during the Goryeo period (918-1392) in Korea: the scholar Yi Saek 李穡 (1328-1396) mentions it in his poetry *Hyoeum* 曉吟 (Chanting at Daybreak). This verse might be translated as follows:7)

At dawn the sunshine has a pale autumnal hue.

*Wayu* (travelling in the mind while lying down) is highly suitable as a cure for bodily illness.

I am sick and old, still I consider myself lucky because I have a peaceful place for treatment.

The joy I have regained allows me to forget my sorrow in this stingy heat …

曉窓日色淡如秋。病骨欲蘇供臥遊。

衰老幸然安所遇。炎蒸得此樂忘憂 …

When Yi Saek was physically weak and unable to leave his home, practicing *wayu* was an effective way to strengthen his mind.

The *wayu*’s aspect of spiritual healing is also revealed in the life style of the Joseon scholar Jang Hyeongwang 張顯光 (1554-1637): According to *Yeoheonjip* 旅軒集 (The Collected Works of Yeoheon) he also cured his illness by observing and enjoying the fascinating landscape from his hall. The hall was named by his disciple and son-in-law Bak Jingyeong 朴晉慶 (1581-1665) as the *Wayudang* 臥遊堂 (Hall of *Wayu*) which he also uses as his pen name (*ho* 號).

Here the real surrounding landscape has the same effect as the paintings on Zong Bing’s four walls. It goes without saying that this kind of voyage in the mind involved more mental and spiritual effort than physical travelling, and that spiritual journeys helped the practitioner to transcend the limits of the here and now and enter into a world where *wayu* could be aesthetically experienced. Zhang argues as follows:

This is the place of *wayu*, the desire to travel in the mind; and here the spirit travels a thousand li in the wink of an eye, and our
eyes pierce hundreds of years of antiquity in a flash …

此其臥遊之辰乎。想其遊也。神千里於瞬息之間。目萬古於須臾之頃者…

The both scholars Yi Saek and Jang Hyeongang did not mention Chinese role models in their texts, but the impact of wayu on mental and physical healing had already been known to Chinese literati: During the Northern Song dynasty, in the second year of yuanyou tingmiao 元祐丁卯 (1087), the Chinese poet Qin Guan 秦觀 (1049-1100) was ill and lying in bed. His friend Gao Fuzhong 高符仲 brought him Wang Wei's 王維 (701-761) painting Wangchuantu 輞川圖 (Landscape Painting with Wangchuan Villa), like this from the Art Institute of Chicago, in the expectation that he might enjoy looking at it. Qin Guan felt much better after his spiritual journey through this landscape painting.9) The literary Yuan artist Ni Zan 倪瓚 (1301-1374) also described similarly the impact of wayu in his poem Gu Zhongzhi lai wen xu shengbing cha 顧仲贄來聞徐生病差 (Gu Zhongzhi came to hear that Xu was sick) as follows:

A plot of land with gouqi 枸杞-wolfsberry and chrysanthemum is good to eat and drink. Walls full of paintings depicting rivers and mountains have a soothing effect on woyou (the journey in the mind) when lying down.

一畦杞菊为供具,满壁江山入卧游.10)

The aspect “travelling in the mind “ is intertwined with the term soyoyu 逍遙遊 (free and unfettered strolling in and with nature) in the context of self-cultivation and in relation to Daoism and Neo-Confucianism. Joseon scholars tried to realize soyoyu as one of noble activities of literati ideology. They travelled to famous mountains and waterfalls for this purpose as well as using the popular literary genre yugi 遊記 (records of travel, travelogues) to express their ideas and emotions. But if their physical circumstances prevented them from going outside, they tried to bring nature into their homes, and this is regarded as a primary idea behind constructing gardens. For example, the Neo-Confucian scholar Seong Im 成任 (1421-1484), a civil minister in Joseon, built a man-made miniature landscape garden in the backyard of his residence in the Mountain Inwangsan in northwest Seoul. The house was placed somewhat higher up on the mountain and offered a fascinating view of the whole capital and the river Han. Seong Im explained his reasons for building the landscape garden: he loved to travel among famous peaks and waterfalls. As he became old and sick he built a three-meter high miniature artificial mountain seokgasan 石假山 from natural rocks with waterfalls, ponds and bamboo grove and further flowers and trees to allow him to enjoy it within the walls of his home.11 The literati-painter Gang Huimaeng 姜希孟 (1424-1483) describes more accurately the reasons for building a garden within the walls of a home because they underline the concept of wayu :

The three mountains and five summits seem to be joined together… Junggyeong [Seong Im], because of your illness you are now thin and weak, but when you are immediately next to a garden, you can get more pleasure from a voyage in your mind and this might prove beneficial to your wellbeing.

如三山五岳 萊為 一塊 … 重卿氏今把淸羸必能對此 而益酣臥遊之興矣.12)

Seong Im’s artificial miniature mountains with waterfalls and ponds are no extant today. According to the drawings made by Korean researchers Yoon Young-Jo and Yoon Young-Hwal,13) a rectangular
pond was built in front of a rock mountain and the two parts were connected by waterfalls and streams (figure 1).  

Figure 1. Drawing of the Seong Im’s Garden, after Yoon Young-Jo & Yoon Young-Hwal 2012, figure 2.

Joseon scholars applied Zong Bing’s perception of wayu for evaluating and enjoying paintings. The literati Yun Gyedong 尹季童 (?-1453), for example, considered himself even better than Zong Bing in the wayu method of contemplation. If he looked at the painting Mongyudowondo 夢遊桃源圖 (Dream Journey to the Peach Blossom Land) (figure 2) by the eminent painter An Gyeon 安堅 (active 1440s-1470s) he would boast of his ability:

How much spiritual effort do we have to make for a distant journey. Looking at this painting, I can arrange my mind better than Woyouweng [Zong Bing].

雨竹煙帆森在眼。臥遊終日亦吾廬.

The scholar Yi Jeonggu 李廷龜 (1564-1635) was able to visualize his secluded life at the idyllic river Seomgang by using the wayu method: During the politically turbulent period of the reign of King Gwanghaegun 光海君 (1575-1641), Yi Jeonggu tried in vain to escape from the court and live a secluded life in the river landscape far from the capital. In 1622, the 14th year of the reign of King Gwanghaegun, his friend Jeong Chungsin 鄭忠信 (1567-1608) had the Seonggango 蟾江圖 (Painting of the River Landscape Seomgang) painted by the master Yi 李畫師. He showed him the finished result to enable him to embark on a dream journey into the painting. Yi was able to visualize his idyllic secluded life at the river Seomgang and wrote his poetic feelings as follows:

A bamboo grove in the rain and sailing boats in the mist, both these scenes are in front of me,

While lying down I can dream of travelling there all day long, and feel that they could be my home.

雨竹煙帆森在眼。臥遊終日亦吾廬.

Through the introduction of Woyoulu by Song scholar Lü Zhuqian and travel records made in the Ming dynasty (like the Mingshan cenggaiji 名山勝槪記 around the 17th century), travelling into famous landscapes became more fashionable and travelogues were widespread. Regardless of whether people had already travelled to the mountains, they used both paintings and travelogues (sansuyugi 山水遊記) simultaneously to enable them to perceive wayu more efficiently. Like paintings, travel records and poems were even written on panel screens and used as preferred objects for wayu in literati studios.

Furthermore, through the development of jingyeong sansuhwa 真景山水畫 (True landscape painting)
in the 17th and 18th centuries, the wayu method also expanded into further dimensions. On the one hand, the Joseon literati desired paintings of famous landscapes for wayu: For example the scholar Jo Yusu 趙裕壽 (1663-1741) very politely asked Yi Byeonghyeon 李秉淵 (1671-1751) for four paintings of Mountain Geumgangsan by the highly sought after literati Jeong Seon 鄭敾 (1676-1759), because Jo was too ill to travel to the mountain himself. Therefore, he had no other recourse than to use Jeong Seon’s paintings to travel in his mind when he was lying down.17)

Another scholar Won Gyeongha 元景夏 (1698-1761) already possessed a desirable painting by Jeong Seon and used it for his wayu as follows:

I already possess both Yeon-ong’s [Kim Changeup 金昌翕, 1653-1722] poem and Jeong Seon’s painting. This enables me to effortlessly step across and climb into the high summit within my mind. The fortress Junghyangseong and the waterfall Manpokdong are spread out in front of my eyes. Shut away in my home, I am experiencing all the points worth seeing, and formulating poems. As a result, I have a feeling that I am always amongst the fascinating peaks with their red autumn leaves. I’m simply travelling into the famous mountains whilst lying down, so I’m not really jealous at all of the people in previous times.

蓋嘗得於淵翁之詩 鄭敾之畵 不費凌躐登頓之勞 而眾香萬瀑森然眼前 閉戶隱凡 飆詠指點 而此身常在於楓嶽卧遊名山 真不羡古人也.18)

Following the order of King Jeongjo 正祖 (regn. 1776-1800) the famous court painter Gim Hongdo 金弘道 (1745-1806) also depicted in the year 1788 the Geumgang sa guncheop 金剛四郡帖 (Albums of the Diamond Mountain located in four Districts) which included the whole Geumgangsan and eight famous landscapes of the East coast (Gwandong palgyeong). The complete version of the original albums no longer exists but some copies partly remain. However, in 2010 a later copy 1816/1853 by anonymous court painters was presented at an auction in Seoul. This includes the complete version containing 75 leaves in nine albums, and also the records of travel in the poem Oheon wayurok 宿軒臥遊錄 (Record of Traveling in Mind while Lying down by Oheon) by Gim Geyon 金季濤 (1773-1823). This rediscovery attracted major attention in educational and broadcasting circles.19)

An album of 16 paintings entitled Songdo gîaengcheop 松都紀行帖 (Album of the Journey to Songdo) from the National Museum of Korea by the scholar painter Gang Sehwang 姜世晃 (1713-1791), who is regarded as the most influential 18th century connoisseur and critic, offers the culmination of this form of wayu in the context of travel and art.20)

During hot summer the 45-year-old Gang Sehwang left his residence Ansan 安山 to visit the city of Songdo in the province of Gyeongi-do, at the invitation of his friend and head of administration (yusu 留守) O Suchae 吳遂采 (1692-1759). Here he went on a sightseeing tour of the famous scenes in the city and its surroundings and after returning home he probably created the album. The intention behind the album ultimately lies in showing how to perceive wayu. He painted for his younger friend and O Suchae’s grandson O Eonsa 吳彦思 (1734-1776) who was physically incapable of travelling. As the inscription (hubal 後跋) indicates:
The younger O [O Eonsa], loved the many paintings and albums collected by his family. For he knew that travelling to landscapes was extremely difficult for him, …But there were many depictions of water and rocks in his collection. And this enabled him to enjoy the scenery without leaving his house.

A special feature of this album is that the artist Gang Sehwang tried to reveal his painting practice. To catch the spirit of the landscape, on the 11th leaf entitled Taejongdae 太宗臺 (The Plateau Taejong) Gang presents himself in a personal and intimate way (figure 3). He is sitting almost in the middle of the painting at the bottom, as an artist on a plateau considering his concept with his paintbrush in his right hand in front of a square empty sheet of paper, whilst looking at gentlemen and their servants across the river. The two gentlemen have made themselves comfortable in the summer heat: the one on the left has taken off his robes and the other one is plunging his left foot into the cold mountain water. Here Gang's exemplary representation in the painting is perhaps making it clear that he has seen the landscapes directly before transforming the spirit of nature into his personal "travel album".

In the European painting tradition, it is not uncommon for a painter to put himself in the scene deliberately. Professional painters portrayed themselves in their studio or in natural surroundings, as the oil painting by French landscape painter Hubert Robert (1733-1808) entitled Ancient Temple: The 'Maison Carree' at Nimes, from the Hermitage collection in Sant Petersbourg shows the artist himself (see the white circle) as an example (figure 4).  

This even applied to the great scholar J.W. Goethe (1749-1832), who also learned drawing and whose theory of colours (published on May 16th, 1810), documented his holistic approach to nature and his powers of observation. In his painting The Frankfurt Office (1769/72) (figure 5) he depicts himself as a draughtsman sitting at a table writing or drawing. But behind the chair is an easel holding his painting.
In Korea neither professional painters nor any literary painter would have painted themselves in that manner. In Gang Sehwa’s painting, the viewer could identify with the painter during wayu as well as discovering the spirit of the landscape.

The scholar painter Gang Sehwang who applied the Zong Bing’s wayu Idea in his Songdo gihaengcheop (Album of the Journey to Songdo), also composed an album with the interest title Wayucheop (figure 6) which includes four leaves in collaboration with Choe Buk (1712-ca.1760) and Heo Pil (1709-1761); orchids with other auspicious motives by Choe Buk (figure 6-1), a depiction of trees with autumnal colour by Heo Pil (figure 6-2), and a river landscape and a calligraphy work with four characters seol wol punhwa 雪月風花 by himself (figures 6-3, 6-4).

It is assumed, that they met to enjoy the paintings in terms of wayu, after which they finished the album Wayucheop. Unlike his album documenting the Journey to Songdo, the Wayucheop does not represent the result of a journey nor does it have any relation to actual travels. This is also not a representation of an unforgettable place that one wants to visit, but rather a compilation of individual miscellaneous motifs from nature. In other words, three gentlemen simply met to enjoy all the paintings in the studio without leaving it. This reflects a more general aspect of wayu, which was already practiced by the Chinese Ming literary painter Shen Zhou (1427-1509).

By declaring Zong Bing’s idea, in his 1506 dated album Woyoutu (Paintings of Travelling in the Mind while Lying Down) in the Peking Palace Museum the literary painter Shen Zhou claims that his wayu method could be much better than Zong Bing’s, because he could enjoy the paintings even in a much smaller album format captured by hand, lying or sitting on bed (chuang 床) whenever he wanted to look at it, whereas Zong Bing's method of wayu needed many more paintings to fill four walls. The 17 album leaves preserved to this day also show all the different motifs including a landscape in style of Yunlin (Ni Zan), an apricot flower, a hollyhock, a hibiscus, a pomegranate (figure 6) and a chick etc., and each piece has its own poem. Shen Zhou may have experienced or been impressed by these themes at some time or other, but they have no relation to any particular journey. As such they represent a variety of painting methods that express Shen’s own interests, his diverse artistic style and his rich mental world.
To sum up, the term *wayu* in Korean art is generally used in two ways which may be applied to various styles. On the one hand, it is primarily used according to the idea of Zong Bing: someone is prevented by their physical surroundings from going outside and tries to connect with nature at home using gardens and paintings. This sense of *wayu* with its spiritual healing aspect is even expanded to include physical benefits to the life style of Joseon scholars. From the 17th century onwards, thanks to the development of *jingyeong sansu*, travelling into well-known landscapes became more fashionable and travelogues were widespread. Regardless of whether people had already travelled to the mountains or not, paintings and travelogues grew simultaneously to enable *wayu* to be efficiently perceived.

On the other hand, the term *wayu* was generally understood as a method of viewing an image in a studio without going outside, as presented by Shen Zhou in his album. Joseon intellectuals also practiced this concept in order to enjoy the paintings, regardless of whether they were healthy or ill, old or young, or having travelled to a landscape or not. The term was regarded as an aesthetic way to enjoy painting and a way of perceiving artworks where the viewer appreciates nature by visualizing it in the mind. From the same perspective many current exhibitions and publications on paintings use the term *wayu* as their primary conception. Here the people who view the exhibited artworks are invited to sink into their own imagination and travel to an ideal people world transcending reality in order to recover from the stresses of everyday life. Finally, one can say that in both cases, the magic word *wayu* serves as the principal and fundamental access into the practice of viewing artistic images in Korea.

Notes

2) Ibid.
3) Ibid. "臥以遊之凡所游履皆圖之於室謂人曰撫琴動操欲令眾山皆響．"
5) Ibid., "…於是畫象布色，構茲雲嶺…華之秀，玄牝之靈，皆可得之於一圖矣華之秀…夫以應目會心為理者，類之成巧，則目亦同應，心亦俱會。應會感神，神超理得。"
6) In China also, like *Xiao Xiang woyoutu* (Travelling in the Mind into Xiao and...


13) See Ibid, figure 3.

14) Further descriptions of artificial gardens in different textual sources like Gasangi (A Record on a Man-Made Mountain) by Seo Geojeong (1420-1488) and Sekgsan pokpogi (Records on Man-Made Mountains and Waterfalls) by the scholar Chae Su 祝壽 (1449-1515) etc. reflect the wayu concept from similar perspectives, while Yi Yik 李稷 (1681-1763), on the contrary, argues in his inscription on Wayucheop 臥遊帖 that there is no objects are needed for the aesthetic experience of wayu, and puts more emphasis on the power of the spiritual voyage. His verse might be translated thus: “Wayu means the voyage of the spirit while the body is lying down. The spirit is the mind of the soul, and the soul can reach everywhere. Because, like a ray of light, it travels ten thousand miles in a second, one should not consider oneself to be dependent on any object.” 臥遊者，身而神遊也，神者心之靈，靈無不達，故光燭九垓，瞬息萬里。疑若不待於物。See Han-guk munjip chonggan DB: Chae Su, Sekgsan pokpogi, Najajip; Yi Jongmuk, “Joseonsidae wayumunhua yeon-gu,” in Jindanhakbo 98 (2004): pp. 88-89.

15) Han-guk munjip chonggan DB: Seo Seomgangdo, Wolsajip.


18) Han-guk munjip chonggan DB: Yun Gyeongha, Changhajip gwon ji 7, song Yi Saho
sijungwangysapungak seo.

19) See the reports by newspapers, for example “200nyeonjeon Jeongjoga bon ‘Geumgangsan geurim’ geudaero,” in Chungang Ilbo, 2010-03-17.


23) The Inscription: "宗少文四壁揭山水 图 自谓 臥遊其間 此冊方可尺許 可以仰眠匡床 一手執之 一手徐徐翻閱 殊得 少文之趣 倦則掩之 不亦便乎 手揭亦為努矣!真愚聞其言,大發笑. 沈周跋.”

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