Contemporary Chinese Art Final Project Proposal:
The Landscape and the Environment: The Tradition of Chinese Landscape Painting and China's Ecological Crisis.

"Man in unity with nature" and "immersing oneself in nature" are generally considered two of the most important tenets of artistic thought in Chinese culture, but how these ideas play out in contemporary art is remarkably complex.[1]

For example, the theme of the 2002 Shanghai Bienalle was Urban Creation. Many of the opening essays in the catalogue and the works by participating artists sought to raise issues of alienation, globalization, communication and the urban environment, but most of the artists and curators seem very positive about urbanization and the "great changes occurring in Chinese cities and the speedy development of Chinese metropolis construction" which have "highly improved citizens' living and working environment."[2] Few seemed critical of, or even interested in, the problematic changes in China's natural landscape and ecology that have resulted from the country's headlong rush into urbanization and industrialization. Some of the few quotes that mentioned traditional ideas about landscape make it seem as though nature as a subject for art is now somehow 'passé'. In her essay in the catalogue, "Chinese New Art in the Time of Urbanization," Li Xu writes, "in ancient China scholars and artists were looking for peaceful, solitary rural life. Nowadays the expanding city expresses the gregarious lifestyle of modern people." This exhibition showcases artists who find this dichotomy problematic, and seek to understand modern attitudes towards the environment in terms of older ideas about nature in art.

Qiu Anxiong's *The New Sutra of the Mountains and the Oceans* animation from the Shanghai Bienalle uses traditional ink painting techniques among other media to create a series of rapidly transforming landscapes that quickly become frightening ecological disasters. Images of overbuilt cites and oil fields populated by creepy insect-wells predominate. The message seems largely targeted at US foreign policy, judging by the masked figures that emerge from the oil-soaked land and fly into recognizable skyscrapers, but the format and some of the themes must hit home for the Chinese as well. Images of Qiu Anxiong's work are online at:
http://www.hanart.com/artistArtwork.php?artist_number=27&page_number=1

The ShangArt gallery photograph is a large, gorgeous, highly textural black and white image of a desolate strip-mining operation, possibly on the sites of a former mountain.

The Chinese Aesthetics of Heterogeneity show at Shanghai MOCA featured Pang Maokun's *The Passing View from a Highway*, a painting of a typically Chinese-looking mountain as seen from a speeding car. The sides of the image are blurred as if from rapid movement, and a highway barrier runs along the bottom. The romantic impossibility of the mountain is incongruous with its realistically rendered 'photographic' setting. This

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[1] "Entry Gate: Chinese Aesthetics of Heterogeneity," Victoria Lu, MoCA Envisage Artistic Director, in *Entry Gate: Chinese Aesthetics of Heterogeneity*, Show Catalog, (Shanghai: MoCA Envisage, 2006) 16.

[2] Xu Jiang, "Overlooking Cities," introductory essay in *Urban Creation: 2002 Shanghai Biennale* (Shanghai: 2002).

image of an object of contemplation and reverence that has become yet another bit of roadside scenery is a clear criticism of the fast-paced, disconnected travel of modern life. The mountain is seen through a side window, and not even the windshield, it is no longer a focus or a destination.

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