Summary

The main research issue of this dissertation is: Why could Dong Qichang (Tung Ch'i-Ch'ang, 1555-1636)'s theory of the Northern and the Southern school of landscape painting have impact on late Ming and the entire Qing Dynasty for more than three hundred years? To answer this question, I shall explore both the academic and non-academic factors of its impact.

The academic factor explaining the impact of a theory refers to whether the theory can answer the questions posed by the tradition of an academic field or whether it can systematize the development of this tradition or whether it can raise some fresh and meaningful questions opening up new lines of research of this tradition. After delving into my research from this perspective, I conclude that the enormous impact of Dong's theory lies on the one hand in Dong's highlighting two schools of landscape painting in the development of Chinese landscape painting before Ming Dynasty from his insightful macro-analysis, and on the other hand in his using the development of Zen (the Chan Sect) in the Tang Dynasty as an analogy not only to locate these two schools of landscape painting in the context of the history of Chinese landscape painting, but also to pinpoint their achievements and failures.

The non-academic factor explaining the impact of a theory refers to whether the proponent can use his personal characteristics like his official position to create a social and political network which is conducive to the dissemination of his theory and whether the social and economic context at that
time is fertile soil for the growing support of the theory. For the former, in
traditional Chinese society, official position and to concomitant political
networks and art circle could clearly help to magnify the impact of an art
theory. For the latter, if an art theory can affect the evaluation of art works and
their market price so as to make the supporters of the theory to obtain higher
status in art and more material benefits, which dovetails with the social and
economic development at that time, then although this economic consequence
has nothing to do with the academic value of the theory itself, it can help the
theory to exert great impact. To answer my research question from this
perspective, I conclude that the enormous impact of Dong's theory lies in
Dong's developing an extensive social network and an art circle through his
political career as well as the economic implication of the literati painting
produced by his theory.

The theoretical implication of this dissertation is that without the full
appreciation of the academic and the non-academic factors, not only will
scholars easily commit the fallacy of criticizing a theory in the history of art
without putting it back to its historical context, but they will also lose sight of
the dynamics of the development of theory of art. The development of Dong's
theory taking a different route from Dong's original idea after Dong's death is a
case in point.