

Geographic Area: East & Inner Asia

Session Type: Organized Panel

633: Travel, Dwell, Muddle: Embodied Experiences of Land and Landscape in Middle Period China



Saturday, March 14, 2026



8:30 AM - 10:00 AM PDT



Location: VCC, Room 209

Organizer(s)



Lucien Sun (he/him/his)

Art History

University of Chicago, United States

Chair(s)

BR

Benjamin Ridgway

Swarthmore College, United States

Paper Presenter(s)

XY

Xiaoshan Yang

University of Notre Dame, United States



Lucien Sun (he/him/his)

Art History

University of Chicago, United States

EK

Elizabeth Kindall

University of St. Thomas, United States

Discussant(s)

CZ

Cong Zhang

University of Virginia, United States

Recent developments in indigenous studies have reminded us of people's complex and often intimate connections to the land. Similarly, scholarship on art and literature of the Song–Yuan dynasties has moved beyond viewing landscape as merely a neutral background, revealing instead diverse and nuanced ways individuals engaged bodily with terrain during this period. Framing devices such as the “Eight Views” started to inspire new ways of conceptualizing, aestheticizing, and representing local and regional landscape across regimes in both the north and the south. Amid political upheaval and natural disasters, the material and ecological realities of inhabiting a place came under sharper scrutiny due to resource constraints. Travel—whether real or imagined—became a complex narrative act, often layered with emotions of loss, memory, and longing, especially when movement was restricted by warfare or border control. No longer merely an obstacle to travel, the sea was increasingly seen as a captivating yet perilous extension of land, stirring deeper artistic and poetic fascination. Encounters with sacred landscapes likewise prompted transformative responses, resulting in fantastic accounts and vivid portrayals of spiritual sites and pilgrimage routes. This period also saw deep resonances between literary and visual approaches to land, as texts and images jointly contributed to evolving modes of spatial experience. Bringing together scholars of literature, history, art history, and religious studies, this panel explores the interdisciplinary dimensions of how land and landscape were perceived, mediated, and received through various embodied actions in the Middle Period China.

Presentations:



The Rise of Oceanic Imagination in Song Poetry

Presenting Author: Xiaoshan Yang – University of Notre Dame



Living with Earthquakes: Rethinking the Iconographic Program of the Main Hall at Lower Guangsheng Monastery

Presenting Author: Lucien Sun (he/him/his) – University of Chicago



Travel and Transformation in the Yandang Mountains

Presenting Author: Elizabeth Kindall – University of St. Thomas