

Original Research Article

The Charm of the Dao in Chinese Painting (A Re-examination of Zong Bing's Preface on Landscape Painting)

Esmacil Radpour*

Department of Religious Studies, Iranian Institute of Philosophy, Tehran, Iran

Received: 20/12/2025

Accepted: 27/06/2026

Available online: 01/10/2026

Abstract

In the art of landscape painting in China, as in many other forms of art, one always finds Daoist roots more apparent than the influences from Confucian or Buddhist traditions. The most fundamental subject matter that elucidates the Daoist origin of this art in China lies in the attitude of Chinese painters toward “forms.” Despite numerous studies concerning the history and techniques of Chinese painting, it is very necessary to analyze ancient texts on the philosophy of painting based on Daoist teachings to understand how ideas manifest in forms and how one can transcend from forms to ideas. Investigating the link between the art of Chinese painting and Daoist metaphysics, this study seeks to answer how the treatise “Preface on Landscape Painting” by Zong Bing (375–443 CE, a lay Buddhist practitioner) resolves the paradox between the limitation of forms and the transcendence of Dao as the Supreme Principle. The findings of this study show that Zong Bing, by proposing concepts such as “kindred resemblance” and relying on the “numinous spirit,” transforms landscape painting into a locus of manifestation for the “charm of the Dao.” Finally, it is elucidated that adhering to the principle of “correspondence with the eye and concordance with the heart” turns the artwork into a gateway that frees the heart-mind of the viewer who steps into it from the bounds of form and connects him to the celestial archetypes of forms.

Keywords: *Chinese Painting, Landscape Daoism, Zong Bing, Form and Formless*

Introduction

In Chinese tradition, the art of landscape painting is not merely an aesthetic endeavor for representing mountains, valleys, and plains; rather, it is a ground for intuiting the flow of Life and a realm for manifesting the bond between forms and the Formless. In this art, “landscape” has never been taken in the sense of “objectified nature.” Formed from two foundations of the natural world, the

mountain (a symbol of firmness and yang) and water (a symbol of flexibility and yin), the Chinese word for landscape (shanshui 山水; lit. mountains and waters) is indeed a representation of the totality of existence and continuous pulses of Life embodied in matter. This is why landscape painting in Chinese art, more than being tied solely to techniques of illustration, is deeply associated with wisdom and metaphysics, and the painter, before being an artist, is a sage or spiritual wayfarer who

* Corresponding author: radpour@irip.ac.ir, +989120378466

tries to re-create the forms of the Cosmic Tablet through the brush.

Although Confucianism and Buddhism each have had their own impact on Chinese art, the fundamental ontological and epistemological roots of landscape painting must be sought in the Daoist teachings. The main problem here is the paradoxical relationship between the nature of the art of painting and the Dao, the Ultimate Principle. According to the ancient Daoist texts like the *Daodejing*, the Dao is formless, colorless, and featureless, while painting is an art entirely based on forms, colors, and lines. This raises a fundamental question: How can the representational artist whose tools are form and matter overcome this paradox and reveal the absolute formlessness of the Dao through sensible forms of landscape? Is the Chinese art of painting a descent into the realm of “lower forms” and a departure from the Dao, or can it serve as a mirror that reflects the formless beauty of the Dao through sensible forms?

The paradox was the main issue in discussions on the philosophy of painting among the artistic elite during the fourth and fifth centuries CE (the Six Dynasties period). In this historical context, thinkers emerged who considered painting a way to contemplate celestial principles. Zong Bing (375–443 CE), the pivotal figure of this essay, composed the treatise *Preface on Landscape Painting* in this very intellectual atmosphere. As a reclusive spiritual wayfarer fascinated by wandering through mountains, when old age prevented him from travelling, he found landscape painting to be a path toward spiritual journeys within his own home. His treatise is one of the earliest influential attempts to link Daoist metaphysics to aesthetics in the study of the art of painting.

Focusing on Zong Bing’s valuable treatise, this paper concerns the solution he proposed for the rift between form and the formless, in how the Daoist painter using “kindred resemblance” and

relying on the “numinous spirit”, elevates painting to a level beyond mere imitation and transforms it into a locus for the manifestation of the “charm” or dynamic allure of the Dao or, in the words of Zhuangzi, the “Grand Beauty” (*damei* 大美) (Zhuangzi, chapter 22; Zhuangzi, 2004: 46a). From this viewpoint, the painter paints not the surface of a mountain, but its true form and the rhythm of Life that brought the mountain into being. The principle of “correspondence with the eye and concordance with the heart” turns painting from a mere human craft to an inward contemplation in which pictorial forms, instead of remaining confined by form and matter, open a gateway to the formlessness of the Dao. Based on an analytical study of primary texts and a careful examination of key terms in the Daoist tradition, by moving beyond mere historical accounts, through a metaphysical interpretation of Zong Bing’s treatise and comparing it with Daoist metaphysical principles, this paper tries to offer a new definition of the relationship between form and the formless in the process of artistic creation, thereby uncovering the inner logic of the aesthetics of Chinese landscape painting.

Research Background

The study of the philosophical foundations of Eastern art has attracted the attention of many researchers in recent decades. In the specialized field of Chinese painting, existing studies have generally focused on historiographical aspects or artistic techniques. However, what has been less addressed is a serious metaphysical analysis of ancient texts from the Six Dynasties period (such as the works of Zong Bing and Wang Wei) based on Daoist philosophy.

In general, there are three distinct approaches in contemporary studies of Chinese painting. First is the historiographical approach, which focuses on the evolution of the schools and styles from the Han to the Qing dynasties. Second is the formalist

approach, which analyzes the composition and hidden geometry in the works of the great masters of Chinese painting, and third is the metaphysical approach, which studies painting as metaphysics revealed on the canvas. The perspective of this study is to be placed evidently in the third category, viewing the Chinese art of painting as an extension of the domain of ideas into the domain of forms. In this view, painting is not solely a visual object for the pleasure of the imaginative faculty, but a locus for contemplation presenting to the viewer the same intuition that the Daoist sage gains when confronted with mountains and streams.

Among Western studies, the most prominent study on Zong Bing's treatise belongs to Susan Bush. In addition to translating this text in *Early Chinese Texts on Painting* (Bush & Shih, 1985), in her article, "Zong Bing's essay on Landscape Painting and the Landscape Buddhism of Mount Lu" (Bush, 1983), placing heavy emphasis on Zong Bing's historical ties to Huiyuan's Buddhist circle, she argues that, unlike Wang Wei's writings, this treatise does not belong to the category of Daoist or Neo-Daoist (Xuanxue) treatises. Following the lead of certain Japanese scholars such as Nakamura Shigeo, Susan Bush analyzes Zong Bing's writing on painting as a form of Landscape Buddhism. In her view, painting serves Zong Bing as an instrument for Buddhist meditation and visualization, which can function as a substitute for wandering through the mountains.

In the present study, however, we contend that although Zong Bing's other attributed treatises and the historical accounts of his ties to the Mount Lu Buddhist circle leave no room for doubt regarding his leanings toward Buddhism, the content of this treatise remains rooted in resolving the paradox of form and formlessness within Daoist metaphysics—just as Preface on Landscape Painting had always prior to the modern era been correctly studied in connection

with the treatises of Gu Kaizhi and Wang Wei as Landscape Daoism. Although Susan Bush's valuable work is filled with meticulous research into the history surrounding this treatise and Huiyuan's Buddhist community, she occasionally presents improbable arguments to prove that this treatise belongs to Landscape Buddhism. For instance, she attempts to correspond Zong Bing's distinctive references to the sages and the wise (the virtuous in her translation) at the beginning of the treatise onto Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Furthermore, where Zong Bing explicitly names examples of these numinous figures—who are the emperor and reclusive mystics of antiquity whose accounts appear primarily in the Daoist text Zhuangzi—she regards them as potential Buddhas and considers these references merely as models of action. Yet, she fails to explain why Zong Bing, if intending to write a treatise on Landscape Buddhism, does not mention Buddhist models and ideals, or why there is a total absence of Buddhist terminology in this treatise. Referencing Japanese scholars, Bush links the ideas that "the sages retain the Dao within themselves" and that "landscape painting manifests the charm of the Dao by means of forms" to a discussion in the *Treatise on the Clarification of Buddhism* (Mingfo Lun), which describes the Dao as Dharmakāya or Nirvāna of Buddhists. However, Buddhist Nirvāna essentially transcends forms and lies completely outside the realm of matter, whereas for Zong Bing, the landscape, both in the outer horizons and on the canvas of a painting, is the locus of manifestation for the beauty and splendor of the Dao, and the Breath of the Dao is immanent and flowing within these very mountains and rivers and their pictorial forms.

Leaving aside further criticisms of minor details, Susan Bush focuses in her article on the probability of religious motivations in Zong

Bing's treatise on landscape painting, whereas the present research seeks to analyze the aesthetic mechanism of the manifestation of the Dao in form—a task that, in the author's view, is impossible without elucidating the connection between the physics of the landscape and the metaphysics of the Dao. An examination of Zong Bing's treatise shows that from his special perspective—which is primarily Daoist and secondarily rooted in the internal unity of religions, adopted when writing the Preface on Landscape Painting—the concept of “form” is not an impenetrable material barrier, but rather a transparent veil through which one can contemplate the formless beauty of the Ultimate Principle. The background of this discussion dates back to the initial treatises of the fifth century CE, where concepts such as Ling (the numinous) and Shen (the spiritual) entered the realm of the philosophy of art from metaphysical texts for the first time. We think that separating Zong Bing's treatise from that tradition results in conceptual confusion.

This paper was originally written in Persian. In order to familiarize Persian-speaking readers with the profound meanings of Daoist teachings, certain terms from the Sufi tradition were utilized to express Daoist concepts. While these terms could have been aligned with the conventional translations found in standard Daoist literature in Western languages, since the English translation of this paper must correspond to the original Persian, most of this specific terminology has been preserved in its original form, giving the text the appearance of a comparative study.

Next, after examining ancient Daoist texts regarding how the formless reality can be related to the world of forms by means of the “supreme forms,” we offer a few remarks on the life of Zong Bing. This is followed by a complete translation and commentary for Zong Bing's Preface on Landscape Painting (Hua shanshui xu 畫山水序) (Radpour, 2023, 183-190).

The Formless in Painting—The Art of Form

It is well known that Daoist texts continuously speak of the formlessness (wuxing 無形, wuxiang 無象), colorlessness (wuse 無色; yi 夷), and featurelessness (wuzhuang 無狀) of the Dao (the Ultimate Principle). Furthermore, Daoist adepts all strive to follow the flow of the Dao (yudao 與道) and to realize its attributes within themselves (dedao 得道; youdao 有道). Thus, “the five colors blind the eye [of the heart]” (Daodejing, chapter 12; Laozi, 2004, 37a) and “the sage is concerned with the belly” (ibid.), which is the locus for the descent of the formless Dao and the spiritual gestation for the second birth, and “not with the [physical] eyes” whose object is only form. On the other hand, Chinese painting, like many other crafts, arts, and sciences in China, has emerged from Daoist teachings more than from any other religion or school of thought. What, then, does the art of painting—which is entirely concerned with form—have to do with the formless Dao?

Before examining the words of the great Chinese painters regarding the formless Dao and the Daoist way of painting, we first seek the answer to the aforementioned fundamental question within ancient Daoist texts. Zhuangzi (2004, 44c) narrates the story of Prince Yuan, the ruler of the State of Song, who once summoned painters to draw his portrait. Many painters arrived, so many that half of them remained outside the hall. One by one, they received the command, paid their respects, sat in a corner to prepare their brushes, mixed their colors, and busied themselves with painting the Prince's portrait. One painter arrived with a significant delay, walking slowly and paying no attention to his surroundings. He received the command and bowed, but he did not remain there; instead, he left. It was as if he was in no rush to deliver his work, nor did he see any necessity to examine the object of his painting. The Prince, whose attention was

drawn to him, sent someone to see what the painter was doing. When the Prince hear them say that the painter has “untied his robe, sat cross-legged, half-naked,” he shouts: “That is him. He is the true painter!”. In this narration, Zhuangzi intends to say that the true painter receives the forms of his painting not from the world of forms, but from the formless Dao. The sitting of the painter alludes to the meditation on and contemplation of divine ideas (guanyi 觀意) and the manifestation of those ideas in the world of true forms (zhenxing 真形), while his becoming naked alludes to the stripping away of the physical body or the liberation of the soul from the bounds of the flesh, thereby journeying through the celestial realm of forms. The true painter obtains the portrait of the Prince not from sensory examination of his face, but through inner contemplation of the true form of his face; this is the active principle (qian 乾) for the manifestation of forms in his painting. However, for the receptive principle (kun 坤) of painting, which consists of the colors and outward forms on the canvas, the single glance with which the true painter saw Prince Yuan while paying respects and receiving the command is entirely sufficient.

According to the most fundamental text in Daoism, namely the Daodejing, written by Laozi, the founder of this tradition, the Dao is formless: “indistinct [from the intensity of darkness] and intangible [from the intensity of luminosity], yet containing all supreme forms” (Daodejing, chapter 21; Laozi, 2004, 38a). It has no form, yet all forms are present before it. Indeed, the Daoist artist is concerned not with sensible forms, but with the principle of the manifestation of forms and the unmanifested forms in the presence of the Dao. According to the Book of Changes (Yijing), these forms, in the process of manifestation, first appear in the realm of Heaven as supreme forms (xiang 象) and then in the realm of Earth in the guise of lower forms

(xing 形) (Huang & Zhang, 2016, 688). According to the Book of Changes (the Xici section), the Dao is “above forms” (xing er shang 形而上), but the station of “vessels”—that is, the locus of the manifestation of the Dao—is “below forms” (xing er xia 形而下) (Huang & Zhang, 2016, 726), while manifestation (bian 變) consists of the “transformation and descent of forms” (ibid.). Through this allusion, it is clear that “forms” denotes the differentiated archetypes within the Dao, from which the Dao itself, in its state of non-determination (wuming 無名; the Nameless), remains transcendent, yet manifests through them to constitute the primordial forms of appearance in the divine realm. With the “transformation and descent” of those primordial forms, the manifestations of the Dao appear in the guise of sensible forms.

The renowned Daoist master Du Guangting (杜光庭; 850–933 CE), in commenting on a passage of the Daodejing which states that the Dao “precedes the Lord of Supreme Forms” (xiang di zhi xian 象帝之先) (Daodejing, chapter 4; Laozi, 2004, 36b), provides a precise explanation of the relation between these primordial forms and the Dao:

The first signs that became manifest are called the Supreme Forms. [Prior to that,] that which is formless is called Qi (Breath [at the stage of the Great Foremost, Taichu 太初]). The first signs of forms are called the Supreme Forms [at the stage of the Great, Taishi 太始], which are the principles for the creation of beings. Over the principles of the ten thousand beings, the station of the Lord of Supreme Forms holds precedence. And the [Essence of the] Great Dao precedes even the Lord of Supreme Forms; that is to say, it is the most transcendent (Du, 2004, 608b).

兆見曰象者，無形曰氣，兆形曰象，生物之首也。萬物之首，象帝居先。大道復在象帝之先，言其高遠也。

The Dao, in respect of its lordship over the

determinations of the archetypal forms within the divine realm (termed the state of the not-yet-differentiated, *weifen* 未分), is called the Lord of Supreme Forms (*xiangdi* 象帝). However, the Essence of the Dao is entirely devoid of any name or form, and it holds precedence even over its manifestation as the Lord of Supreme Forms. In the *Daodejing*, the Lord of Supreme Forms is also called the Great Supreme Form (*daxiang* 大象) (*Daodejing*, chapters 35 and 41; Laozi, 2004, 39b, 40b), which, in the words of Wang Bi (王弼; 226–249 CE)—one of the earliest commentators on the *Daodejing*—is the Mother of Celestial Supreme Forms (*tianxiang zhi mu* 天象之母) (Wang, 2004, 203c). That is to say, it is the Mother of the ten thousand beings (*Daodejing*, chapter 1; Laozi, 2004, 36a) through the mediation of the celestial supreme forms. To put it another way, the ten thousand beings, insofar as they are children in the home close to the Mother, are regarded as supreme forms; yet when they grow up (i.e. descend) and leave the home (i.e. manifest), they become transformed into terrestrial forms, and the Dao exercises lordship over them at both stages. This “Great Supreme Form is devoid of terrestrial forms” (*Daodejing*, chapter 41; Laozi, 2004, 40b), yet the terrestrial lower forms, acting as its reflections, symbolically manifest it.

The true forms that constitute the subject of the Daoist painter’s work are, first and foremost, the “primordial forms.” As Coomaraswamy (1934, 15) quotes from Xie He (謝赫; lived in the early sixth century CE) the formulator of the Six Laws of Painting (*liufa* 六法): “The painters of old painted the idea (*yi* 意), and not merely the shape (*xing* 形)”. In this expression, “shape” can denote both sensible forms and imaginary forms; however, the true painter transcends both of these and turns his attention toward the unmanifested primordial forms within the Dao, which are none other than the “ideas” and

realities of things. The Dao, of course, is not bound by forms, yet it encompasses all forms. While the common people and lesser artists deal solely with sensible forms, true artists apprehend the supreme forms within the Dao-oriented heart (*daoxin* 道心; the Intellect) and manifest them anew in their work in the guise of other terrestrial forms. To put it another way, all terrestrial forms in the world are the descent and manifestation of the supreme forms; instead of imitating sensible lower forms, the true painter follows their source—that is, the supreme forms or true forms. It is in this way that the aura of their painting is such that the “flow of Life” (*shengdong* 生動) can be witnessed within them.

Gu Kaizhi (顧愷之; 344–409 CE), the great Daoist philosopher, painter, calligrapher, and poet of the Eastern Jin dynasty, was the first person in China to write about the philosophy of painting in relative detail. His main theory, “drawing the spirit by using the form” (*yixing xieshen* 以形寫神) (Zhang, 1936, 189), is an answer to the same fundamental question raised at the beginning of this paper, which is rooted in Daoist teachings. Shortly after him, two other intellectual painters, Zong Bing (375–443 CE) and Wang Wei (王微; 414–453 CE), also left behind writings on the art of painting, all of which can be considered as commentaries on that same thought of Gu Kaizhi. This thought reaches its peak with Xie He, who considers the first law of his Six Laws of Painting to be the “rhythm of the [Primordial] Breath, or the flow of Life” (*qiyun shengdong* 氣韻生動) (Xie, 2011). None of the paintings by Gu Kaizhi, Zong Bing, and Wang Wei survived the hazards of history, and other than some later copies of those works, nothing has reached our time. However, the sublime thoughts they wrote down about painting have been highly influential throughout history up to the present day (Sullivan, 1967, 97).

Zong Bing (宗炳, 375–443 CE)

Zong Bing came from an influential family of officials. His grandfather was a governor, his father was a magistrate, and his mother was a wise, eloquent, and well-educated woman. He was repeatedly offered government positions, but he never accepted one. He spent a part of his valuable life practicing agriculture to earn a living and support a family that was initially brought up in luxury but later suffered from poverty. Another part of his life was spent traveling, one of the results of which is the book *Record of Travels to Mountains Heng and Lu* (Hengshan Lushan Ji 衡山廬山記), which has not survived down to our time. His wife, Lady Luo (羅), also possessed a noble spirit and shared the same interests as her husband. Following her death, Zong was immersed in grief, and it was only by intense study of Buddhist teachings that he was able to free himself from that sorrow.

A treatise on painting has survived from Zong Bing titled *Preface on Landscape Painting* (Hua Shanshui Xu 畫山水序). He probably wrote this work in the twilight of his life. The oldest book that has recorded Zong Bing's writing on painting is *Records of Famous Paintings of All Dynasties* (Lidai Minghua Ji 歷代名畫記, compiled by Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠 815–877 CE, 6th juan) (Zhang, 1936, 208–210) in 847 CE. In that work, prior to inserting the text, a brief summary of Zong's life is recorded, which is entirely drawn and abridged from two historical books, namely the *Book of Song* (Song Shu, Chapter 93; Shen, 1974, 8, 2278–2279) and the *History of the Southern Dynasties* (Nan Shi, Chapter 75; Li, 1975, 6, 1860–1861), both under chapters titled “Biographies of Recluses”:

Zong Bing, with the courtesy name Shaowen, was a native of Nieyang in Nanyang [located in Henan Province]. He was highly skilled in calligraphy and painting. [Liu] Yigong, the Prince of Jiangxia, once recommended Bing to the Prime Minister. He was

subsequently summoned for office several times, but in the end, he never accepted. He was skilled in the guqin [the Chinese zither] and calligraphy, and harbored a profound love for landscape [shanshui]. To the west, he traveled to the Jing and Wu mountains, and to the south, he climbed Mount Heng, where he built a dwelling and dwelled for a time, his heart yearning for [the peaceful ideals of] Shang Ping. Due to illness, he returned to Jiangling [in Hubei Province], sighing: “Alas! Old age and sickness have both arrived, and I fear it will be difficult to travel to all the famous mountains. I must solely cleanse my heart to contemplate the Dao, and wander through them while lying down.” Wherever he had traveled, he painted the scenes upon the walls, sitting and reclining before them; such was his noble spirit. He lived to the age of sixty-nine (Zhang, 1936, 207–210).

宗炳，字少文。南陽涅陽人。善書畫，江夏王義恭嘗薦炳於宰相，前後辟召，竟不就。善琴書，好山水，西陟荆巫，南登衡岳，因結宇衡山，懷尚平之志。以疾還江陵，歎曰：「噫，老病俱至，名山恐難遍遊，唯當澄懷觀道，臥以游之。」凡所遊歷，皆圖於壁，坐臥向之，其高情如此。年六十九。

This yearning for the peace-seeking ideals of Shang Ping (尚平)—also known as Xiang Ziping (向子平) of the Later Han dynasty—is highly telling. As the ultimate exemplar of the reclusive lifestyle in classical Chinese literature, Ziping spent his life immersed in the Daodejing and the Yijing. Based on an inspiration he drew from parts of the Yijing (the hexagrams of Decrease and Increase), he believed that poverty was better than wealth, and low status was preferable to the nobility. Therefore, as soon as his children were married, he left his family and asked them to consider him dead. Then, pursuing his long-held dream, he went wandering through the five sacred mountains and famous peaks with one of his friends, and no one ever knew what ultimately

became of him (Ye, 1965, 10, 2958–2959). By invoking this prototype, Zong Bing establishes a clear spiritual lineage, framing his own retreat as a continuation of Ziping’s sacred wandering.

Zong spent just under two months with the great monk Huiyuan (慧遠; 334–416 CE), the founder of the Mahayana Buddhist Pure Land tradition. Furthermore, Zong wrote a treatise titled *On the Clarification of Buddhism* (Mingfo Lun 明佛論), in which he discussed the concept of the immortality of the spirit and its temporary dwelling within physical forms, arguing for the harmony of Buddhism with Confucian and Daoist teachings, as well as the necessity of committing to the Buddhist faith to attain the Truth. Although one can confidently consider Zong Bing a lay Buddhist at the time he composed his treatise on landscape painting, the view he adopts in this particular work is entirely Daoist; indeed, we find no trace of the Buddhist terminology and arguments that are present in Zong’s other treatise, even when he explicitly recalls his travels to Mount Lu and the Stone Gate.

Consequently, his theory of painting is profoundly Daoist, and this treatise has been correctly classified—alongside two other treatises by Gu Kaizhi and Wang Wei—under the category of Landscape Daoism (Bush, 2004, 60). The core of his teaching can be summarized as “manifesting the charm of the Dao by means of forms” (yixing meidao 以形媚道). In Zong Bing’s view, a work of art must be such that it renders the beauty of the Dao manifest within the forms of painting. It is for this reason that landscape painting, despite “possessing a material substance,” is in reality a “drawing of the numinous spirit” (quling 趣靈) into forms. This “drawing” implies both portraying the formless cosmic spirit within a shape, and drawing down the spirit from the celestial realm into the very soul of the artist.

Preface on Landscape Painting

What follows is a translation and commentary on Zong Bing’s treatise, *Preface on Landscape Painting* (Hua Shanshui Xu 畫山水序).

One: The sages keep the Dao within themselves to respond to beings; the wise cleanse their hearts to savor the forms. As for landscapes, as physical substance appears, it draws in the numinous spirit. 聖人含道應物，賢者澄懷味像，至於山水，質有而趣靈。

The response of the sages (shengren 聖人) to beings is such that they find the true nature of these beings within the Dao, and find the manifestation of the Dao within them. “Responding to beings” (yingwu 應物) as a term is rooted in the Zhuangzi (chapter 22), which depicts the perfected as possessing clear hearts, boundlessly ready to respond. The heart of the sage, or the Dao-oriented heart (daoxin 道心; the Intellect), is a polished mirror for contemplating the Dao within beings and beings within the Dao. At a lower level, the wise (xianzhe 賢者), in order to taste and savor the form of beings—meaning to understand their imaginal realities by observing their physical shape and seeing the manifestation of the Formless within forms—wash their hearts and purify their souls. The “soul” of the wise, or the human heart (renxin 人心; the reason), is the locus for contemplating the celestial form of things. The relationship between the sages and the wise is like the relationship between the sun and the moon, with the latter receiving its light from the former.

It is necessary to note that “mountain and water” (shanshui 山水) means both the magnificent landscapes of mountains and rivers, and the technical term for “landscape painting.” It appears that at this point, the author truly intends the landscape of wild nature as the subject matter of the artwork, which he will discuss later. Regarding the word qu 趣, which is translated here as “to draw in”, and also includes other meanings such as

“to take delight in,” and regarding the sentence in which this word is used, as Bush (1983, 157) has shown, Japanese translators have offered various readings and translations. Of course, *qu* does not literally mean to sketch or paint, but in this context, it strongly brings to mind the Sanskrit word *ākaraṣaṇa* (from the verbal root *kṛṣ*), which means both to draw a line and to attract toward oneself (Coomaraswamy, 1934, 5–6 & 173). This is exactly like the Persian word *kashīdan*, which holds both meanings—just as the English word “draw,” from a completely different root. Etymologically, the Sanskrit *kṛṣ* and the Persian *kashīdan* are connected to the word *khīsh* (plow). The function of a plow is to be drawn across the earth, and at the same time, the furrows created on the ground are like drawing lines, just as the movement of a pen on paper reminds us of the movement of a plow on agricultural land.

It is very interesting that in the ancient dictionary *Shuowen Jiezi* (completed around 100 CE), the definition of the word *hua* 畫, meaning “to paint/painting,” states: “*Hua* means drawing boundaries. It is an image of drawing furrows and lines around agricultural fields, which is like drawing [on the earth]” (Xu Shen: Book 4, entry 1934). In other words, the art of the farmer is also a form of painting; first, by digging the earth, the farmer designs it, and after sowing the seeds—which is like breathing life into the body of the earth—the farmer colors it through irrigation. The work of a true painter is to attract toward themselves the inner meanings and realities of things, or the numinous spirit (*ling* 靈), from the origin of the spiritual realm or the independent world of imagination to the destination of the artist’s imaginative faculty. This is how landscapes of mountains and streams operate in the physical world; when their material substances—whether in the outer world or on the canvas of a painting through colors—appear, they attract and pull the numinous spirit toward

themselves. In short, the spiritual path of true painters does not differ much from the path of the sages and the wise (that is, the mystics and philosophers).

Two: This is why the likes of Xuanyuan, Yao, Kong (Confucius), Guangcheng, Dawei, Xu You, and the brothers of the land of Guzhu, surely went on travels to [mountains such as] Kongtong, Juci, Miaogu, Ji, Shou, and Dameng.

是以軒轅、堯、孔、廣成、大隗、許由、孤竹之流，必有崆峒、具茨、藐姑、箕、首、大蒙之游焉。

The names mentioned in this passage are all great sages of ancient times who either traveled to the mountains or lived in them. The Yellow Emperor [Xuanyuan] (according to legends, around the 27th century BCE) was a sage-ruler who went to Mount Kongtong to meet Guangchengzi, a secluded mystic, and studied under him. In Daoist texts, Guangchengzi is considered one of the manifestations of Lord Lao during the era of the Yellow Emperor, just as Laozi is another manifestation of the same deity during the Zhou dynasty (Zhuangzi, chapter 11; Zhuangzi, 2004, 21c; Michael, 2012, 66–67). Furthermore, the Yellow Emperor, along with six other individuals whom Zhuangzi (2004, 52a) calls the seven sages (*qisheng* 七聖), once traveled to Mount Juci to meet Dawei 大隗, who was also a secluded mystic. Emperor Yao (according to legends, around the 24th century BCE) also met Xu You in the mountains and took him as his guide and mentor, even offering him the throne to rule over China, though Xu You refused. The brothers of the land of Guzhu (around the 12th century BCE) also preferred to flee to Mount Shouyang instead of one choosing to rise to power as the ruler. In the Daoist tradition, there is an unbreakable bond between immortals and mountains (Radpour, 2021), and this is evident in the character *xian* 仙, meaning “immortal” or “transcendent,” which depicts a

person next to a mountain. The three peaks in the ancient drawing of this character refer to the three ideal mountainous islands in the eastern sea of the celestial realm, and the immortals reside in those paradises. These mountainous paradises are manifested as actual mountains in the material world.

Three: Furthermore, they have called it [namely, traveling to see the landscapes] the delight of the benevolent and the wise. Just as the sages model themselves after the Dao by means of their spirits, and the wise connect with it, so do mountain and water manifest the charm of the Dao by means of forms, and the benevolent find delight in it. Is this not almost the same?

又稱仁智之樂焉。夫聖人以神法道，而賢者通；山水以形媚道，而仁者樂。不亦幾乎？

This means that just as compliance with the Dao is within the inner reality of the sages, the charm of the Dao's beauty is hidden within the inner reality of the forms of landscapes, and the appearance of these forms is the bridge to that inner reality. Confucius (2011, 6:23) says, "The wise find delight in water; the benevolent find delight in mountains". This implies that the wise are yang and find delight in their complement, the yin element of painting, which is water; while the benevolent are yin and find delight in their complement, the yang element of painting, which is the mountain. Painters depict the yin and yang aspects of the Dao in water and mountains, and the wise and the benevolent find delight in observing it. The sages seek to manifest the Dao within their soul or spirit (shen 神), and true painters seek to manifest the beauties of the Dao through the forms of painting. These two approaches—namely, esoteric practice and art, or the Way of the Sages (shengdao 聖道) and the Way of the Painters (huadao 畫道)—are certainly not far from each other.

The word mei 媚, which is translated here as "charm" (or rather, in its verbal state, as

"manifesting charm"), consists of two parts: 女 meaning "woman," and 眉 (also a phonetic element) meaning "eyebrow" or features of the eyes and eyebrows. Furthermore, this word is homophonous with mei 美, which means "beauty," and taken together, it depicts a feminine charming glance or coquetry that adds to her beauty. As Bush (1983, 157) observantly points out, Zong Bing's contemporary poet, Xie Lingyun, uses the word mei with a similar meaning in a few occasions; for instance, he writes: "White clouds embrace the secluded rocks; and green bamboos manifest the charm of the light ripples" (from the poem "Passing by the Shining Villa," Guo Shining Shu 過始寧墅), in which "manifest the charm" translates mei 媚. Bush translates this word in a simplified manner as "displaying the beauty." Alongside this "beauty" and attracting quality, which as previously mentioned reminds us of the "Grand Beauty" in the words of Zhuangzi, the imagery of a gentle and continuous movement in the concept of charm—which symbolically implies the flow of Life—must not be forgotten. All in all, the "charm of the Dao" means the all-pervasive beauty and grace of the Dao flowing through the comprehensive emanation of Life.

Four: I deeply miss Mounts Lu and Heng, and am long separated from the peaks of Jing and Wu, unaware that old age is suddenly arriving. I am ashamed that I can no longer concentrate my qi and harmonize my body, fearing that my unsteady steps would be injured while traversing [the slippery path of] the Stone Gate. Therefore, I paint images and spread colors to erect these cloud-covered ridges right here.

余眷戀廬衡，契闊荊巫，不知老之將至。愧不能凝氣怡身，傷跼石門之流，於是畫象布色，構茲雲嶺。

The Stone Gate (Shimen 石門) is a magnificent and highly inaccessible pass in Mount Lu, located about ten miles south of the Donglin Temple, which is the

birthplace of the Pure Land school of Buddhism. This beautiful yet extremely difficult terrain is beautifully described in detail in the Preface on Poetry on Wandering at the Stone Gate (You Shimen Shi Xu 遊石門詩序). This “wandering” refers to a group excursion made by Huiyuan and his disciples in the second month of spring in 400 CE. Zong Bing himself did not participate in this journey.

Although Bush (*ibid.*, 146–152) has, with commendable precision, studied the geographical and historical connection of this passage to the Buddhist circle of Mount Lu and the excursion to the Stone Gate, certain terms used in this paragraph still demonstrate the dominance of Daoist thought over the author’s Buddhist inclinations. Zong Bing expresses his physical inability to travel using the term “concentrating qi” (ningqi 凝氣). This is a concept used in the Daodejing (chapter 10) with the expression zhuanqi to convey the same meaning. For Zong Bing, it refers to those Daoist practices that, alongside spiritual cultivation, also lead to the strengthening of physical vitality.

Five: Principles that were cut off in the eras prior to middle antiquity can be sought through the mind thousands of years later. Meaning that is hidden beyond words and images can be grasped by the heart through books and records. How much more so for that which the body has lingered around, and the eyes have bound themselves to! It is to copy form by means of form, and to depict color by means of color.

夫理絕於中古之上者，可意求於千載之下。旨微於言象之外者，可心取於書策之內。況乎身所盤桓，目所綢繆。以形寫形，以色貌色也。

The truths (li 理) of wisdom are timeless; even if they are abandoned in a certain era, sages of later times—even a thousand years later—can find them out and explain them. Just as Confucius, six centuries after the founding of the Zhou dynasty, revived the wisdom of the Zhouyi and renewed the

era of King Wen and the Duke of Zhou. Similarly, the inner meanings and subtle indications left behind by mystics in books might go unnoticed by most, yet after thousands of years, a man of the heart may understand and expound upon them.

The same applies to forms. According to the Book of Changes says, “Heaven suspends the supreme forms” (天垂象) (Huang & Zhang, 2016, 719). The forms originate in the realm of pure forms, suspended in heaven, and manifest in physical bodies and objects. Therefore, a true painter who has once confronted the descended guise of the supreme forms can seek them out again in the realm of suspended forms and depict them once more. Thus, observing the sensible forms is a necessary, though not sufficient, element for painting. It is necessary for invoking the celestial supreme forms within the soul of the artist. This mechanism is similar to someone recalling something from memory upon seeing a sign. By viewing landscapes in sensible forms, the painter likewise invokes the truth of the forms from the realm of true forms within their own heart. Here too, the text points to the identical nature of the work of the sages and true painters.

Six: Furthermore, consider the greatness of the Kunlun mountains and the smallness of the pupil of the eye. If you open that tiny eye too close to the mountain, you cannot see its form. But if you take a distance of several miles and look, the entire mountain can be enclosed within the tiny pupil of the eye. Truly, the farther away you go, the smaller it appears. Now, if you stretch a piece of transparent silk to capture a distant view, the form of the Lang peak of the Kunlun mountains can be enclosed within a single square inch. A vertical line of three inches will be equal to a height of thousands of yards, and a horizontal line of a few feet can represent distances of a hundred miles. This is why the viewer of a painting is only concerned about a lack of kindred resemblance, and not about the

reduction of size affecting its likeness. This is a natural tendency. In this way, the beauty of Mounts Song and Hua, and the spirit of the Mysterious Female can all be attained in a single painting.

且夫崑崙山之大，瞳子之小，迫目以寸，則其形莫睹，迴以數里，則可圍於寸眸。誠由去之稍闊，則其見彌小。今張絹素以遠暎，則崑閬之形，可圍於方寸之內。豎劃三寸，當千仞之高；橫墨數尺，體百里之迴。是以觀畫圖者，徒患類之不巧，不以制小而累其似，此自然之勢。如是，則嵩華之秀，玄牝之靈，皆可得之於一圖矣。

In this passage, Zong Bing points out the symbolic nature of painting and does not consider the painter's task to be a mere reflection of the details of the subject. What makes this representation possible is observing the principles of correspondence. Therefore, "kindred resemblance" is what really matters, rather than "particular resemblance." Kindred resemblance is like the symbolic equality of a landscape painting with the actual landscape itself. Now, considering the idea of "drawing the spirit through forms," this kindred resemblance means observing celestial forms from a distance—namely, through the faculty of imagination—and drawing the form received by the eye of the heart onto the surface of the painting.

In Daoist mythology, Kunlun is the most important mountainous paradise in the celestial realm, and in some accounts, it is called the center of the world. This mountainous paradise has three layers: the highest layer reaches the highest heaven and is the dwelling place of the Supreme Lord (Shangdi 上帝), the middle layer belongs to the Hanging Gardens and the Queen Mother of the West (Xiwangmu 西王母), and the lower layer belongs to the Garden of the Cool Wind (Radpour, 2021). Also, the three peaks of this mountainous land are to be distinguished. The one facing directly North is the "Lang" mentioned in the text, or Lofty Wind Peak (Langfeng Dian 閬風巔) (Dongfang, 2004, 78c).

Looking at this celestial paradise with a tiny pupil from a distance means observing grand celestial forms, which can be understood by humans who are restricted to sensory means through kindred resemblance.

"The spirit of the Mysterious Female" refers to chapter 6 of the Daodejing, which speaks of the "valley spirit" and calls it the "Mysterious Female" and the "gate of heaven and earth." This is the Dao itself in respect to its being the origin of countless manifestations. Depicting the spirit of the Mysterious Female means painting the charms of valleys and rivers in a way that they are understood as manifestations of the Mysterious Female. In landscape painting, waters and valleys are considered yin, while peaks and mountains are yang, and they complete one another. As Bush (1983, 159) has noted, Mounts Song and Hua—which are among the five sacred Daoist mountains—are the yang complements to the yin spirit of the Mysterious Female here. Zong Bing's teachings here planted the seeds for the idea of "manifesting the great within the small" (xiaozhong jian da 小中見大) in the art of painting, and the thought of Ji Cheng (計成, 1582–1642 CE) about "borrowing scenery" (jiejing 借景) in the art of garden design.

Seven: If the principle [of painting] is based on "correspondence with the eye and concordance with the heart," then when its kindred resemblance is skillfully completed, the eye will likewise correspond and the heart will also concord. When this correspondence and concordance stimulate the spirit, the spirit transcends, and the [celestial] principles are attained.

夫以應目會心爲理者，類之成巧，則目亦同應，心亦俱會。應會感神，神超理得。

If the painter, in addition to the outward resemblance of the painted forms to objects, seeks an inward correspondence with the truth of those objects within the heart and reflects this in his painting, then

the viewer of the artwork will also find the painted forms to be responsive and will find the truth of the forms of the objects within his own heart. Thus, what he sees with the eye will “respond” and “correspond,” while what he perceives with the heart will “agree” and “concord.” When formal correspondence and spiritual concordance come together, they stimulate (gan 感) the soul or spirit of the viewer, helping it to transcend (chao 超) the limitation of forms and arrive at the celestial principles (li 理). Celestial principles are the heavenly archetypes of objects and forms, and ultimately, the inner realities of those archetypes within the Dao. The expression “attaining the principles” (lide 理得) is derived from the Book of Changes (Huang & Zhang, 2016, 688). If the pictorial forms are manifestations of the grace of the Dao, then the insightful viewer beholds the formless beauty of the Dao through seeing these forms. Zong Bing calls this entire process the principle of “correspondence with the eye and concordance with the heart” (yingmu huixin 應目會心). Therefore, in terms of the cyclical movement of correlative resonance (ganying 感應), at first the painting itself acts as stimulus (gan) and the correspondence of the eye and concordance of the heart with it will be the response (ying) it receives. Secondly, the very union of eye and heart becomes a new stimulus (gan), invoking the transcendence of the spirit as its ultimate response (ying).

Eight: Even if you were to search in vain for remote cliffs once more [after having attained the celestial principles], what could be added [to your spiritual experience]? Since the substance of the [cosmic] spirit is without boundaries, it dwells in forms and stimulates its own kindred [the spirit of the viewer]. The [celestial] principles enter into its reflections and signs. He who subtly draws [things] with sincerity indeed attains this ultimate goal.

雖復虛求幽岩，何以加焉？又神本亡端，棲形感類，理入影迹，誠能妙寫，亦誠盡矣。

When painting reaches perfection, and the eternal principles and spirit manifest within it, the outward

form of things is merely another copy of the manifestation of those principles. For the wise, the painting itself is sufficient to attain and observe those principles in the guise of forms. This statement strongly recalls the teaching of Wang (n.d.) regarding “words, images, and meaning,” where he states that when you grasp the image, you forget the words, and when you grasp the meaning, you forget the image. Now, if the ultimate goal is to arrive at the celestial principles, once someone arrives at those principles by beholding a painting, what further necessity is there to seek the outward manifestations of those principles in the physical horizons?

The substance of the cosmic spirit refers to the formless and immaterial spirit that can dwell within form and matter. Stimulating (gan 感) recalls the non-action of the Yi (the source of manifestations) in the Book of Changes: “When the Yi... is stimulated, it penetrates all affairs under heaven” (感而遂通天下之故) (Huang & Zhang, 2016, 716). Similarly, the substance of the spirit slumbering behind the pictorial forms, when stimulated by being truthfully viewed, penetrates “its own kindred” (lei 類)—that is, the soul of the viewer. It harmonizes with it, and the soul responds (ying) to it, revealing the true aspect of those forms to the viewer: “Things of the same tone respond (ying) to one another; things of the same breath seek one another” (同聲相應，同氣相求) (Yijing, Wenyan, 1:6; Huang & Zhang, 2016, 84–85).

The duality of spirit (shen) and principle (li) here refers to the two dynamic and static aspects of the manifestation of the Real. This Real, in its dynamic aspect, is the spirit that breathes life into the artwork, and in its static aspect, is the principle that completes its internal order, rationality, and structure. In other words, when Zong Bing says, “spirit dwells in forms and principles enter into its reflections and signs,” it means that, like a river flowing between mountains, “Life” flows through “order,” and hence the grace of the Dao (dynamic beauty within static majesty) becomes visible.

What has been translated as “reflections” (ying 影) also means “shadow” or “images.” The entry of principles into their reflections and signs corresponds to the manifestation of celestial principles in the world under heaven, but on the canvas of a painting. Just as the celestial principles manifest in the world and, according to the Book of Changes, are “to be attained in the world under heaven” (天下之理得) (Huang & Zhang, 2016, 688), they have also appeared in the pictorial images. “Subtly” is the adverbial usage of miao 妙 of the Daodejing. Laozi (chapter 1) speaks of “observing the subtle” (guanmiao 觀妙), and Zong Bing speaks of “subtly drawing” (miaoxie 妙寫), which is but “drawing the subtle”.

Nine: Thus, reposing in leisure, regulating my breath, tilting my cup, playing the guqin, having the painted scrolls unrolled in front of my face in solitude, though sitting here, I explore the four corners of the earth. In this way, I do not depart from the abundant spectacles of heaven’s grandeur, and I alone respond to these uninhabited lands [in the paintings], where mountain peaks rise to the skies and misty forests obscure the view. The sages and the wise of past ages had ten thousand kinds of joy merged in their souls and thoughts. What else should I do? I release my soul, and that is all. What is more joyful than to release one’s soul?

於是閒居理氣，拂觴鳴琴，披圖幽對，坐究四荒，不違天勵之藁，獨應無人之野。峰岫嶢嶷，雲林森眇。聖賢暎於絕代，萬趣融其神思。余復何為哉，暢神而已。神之所暢，孰有先焉。

In this passage, Zong Bing refers to a simple way of life, far from the chaotic world and free from material preoccupations, spent in solitude and alongside pristine nature. He also refers to his theory of “traveling while reclining” (woyou 臥遊). This sacred repose allows him to release his soul and ascend to the realm of celestial principles. Furthermore, he indirectly emphasizes the necessity of inner tranquility, of living close to nature, and of spiritual contemplation for an artist. Is not the pseudo-artistic distortion of our time the result of being distanced from such an atmosphere?

Zhuangzi’s theory of “free and easy wandering” (xiaoyaoyou 逍遙遊) has a tangible resonance in this passage of Zong Bing’s treatise, and the expression “uninhabited wilderness” (wuren zhi ye 無人之野) is directly derived from the Zhuangzi (chapter 20)—a text that Zong constantly keeps before his eyes. Moreover, “releasing the soul” (changshen 暢神) also means the expansion and unfolding of the soul, which brings joy and bliss, linking it to the “joy of the sages and the wise.”

For the Daoists, just as “the Dao is constantly without action, yet nothing is left undone” (Daodejing, chapter 37; Laozi, 2004, 39b), the Dao is also absolutely formless, while simultaneously all forms are manifested from it. In the common view, emphasis is often placed on the first half of this formula, while the second half is neglected. Laozi, however, acknowledges all forms and all beings as having a prior presence within the Dao. What we perceive of the form of things in the sensible world is the appearance of those very same supreme forms that reside with the Dao.

According to passages in the Yijing (Huang & Zhang, 2016, 688), when primordial forms are coagulated in the celestial realm, they are called “supreme forms” (xiang 象), and when they are coagulated in the terrestrial realm, they are called “lower forms” (xing 形). The art of painting, superficially, is concerned with these terrestrial forms—both when it addresses its object, namely the form of existing things, and when it displays the pictorial forms on a hanging scroll, tablet, wall, paper, or any other medium through lines and colors. Yet, the sage-painters of China viewed the mechanism of painting as akin to the mechanism of creation itself. They believed that the perfection of the art of painting lies in deriving its object not merely from the outward forms of beings, but from the spiritual Breath (qi) that manifests those forms. Gu Kaizhi, Zong Bing, and Wang Wei were the first to write on the philosophy of the art of painting. Drawing upon Daoist teachings,

they all held the view that true painters did not merely deal with forms, but with the formless spirit, and that true art is to manifest that which is formless within the guise of forms—naturally (ziran 自然), of course, and accompanied by kindred resemblance.

Conclusion

The present study, aimed at clarifying the relationship between the art of painting—which is essentially bound to form—and the formless Dao, has offered a philosophical Daoist interpretation of Zong Bing’s treatise, Preface on Landscape Painting. In medieval Chinese thought, painting is not merely the representation of nature, but an artistic and simultaneously contemplative mechanism for intuiting the rhythm of Life. The answer to the central question of this study regarding how the formless manifests in the guise of form must be surveyed in the states of macrocosmic manifestations in Daoism and the transformation of form through the mediation of the “spirit.” According to this, although the “lower form” (xing) is mixed with matter, it does not remain blocked or arrested within it; but it serves as a locus of manifestation through which the “celestial images” (xiang) and, ultimately, the grace of the Dao become visible through imaginal symbolization. In the same way, true painting is not a limited illustrated scroll, but—to borrow Laozi’s expression—“a gate opened to many subtleties.”

Introducing the principle of “correspondence with the eye and concordance with the heart,” Zong Bing establishes a link between seeing with the physical eye and seeing with the eye of the heart. Furthermore, his idea of “kindred resemblance” dissolves the boundary between realism and abstraction. It is for this reason that, at first glance, Chinese landscape painting appears to the viewer simultaneously as an image of reality and an image of a dream. On this basis, landscape painting rises above the level of a mere human craft. Here, the painter is no longer an imitator of nature, but a spiritual wayfarer who, with his brush, lays open to contemplation his insight into the flowing of the Dao’s unseen Breath (qi)

through “mountains and waters.” Ultimately, this study demonstrates that “landscape” in the Daoist tradition is not an object for appropriation, but a realm for spiritual ascent in which both the artist and the audience of the artwork are freed from the bounds of form and move toward unity with the Cosmic Spirit. It is from this perspective that in ancient Chinese anecdotes, landscape painting is sometimes introduced as a place to dwell within rather than merely a canvas to look at; the viewer steps into the painting, departing into its depths for “free and easy wandering”, and dissolves the distance between himself and the elements depicted on the scroll.

By referring to the “ultimate goal” (jin 盡; section eight), Zong Bing completely dismantles the notion of “art for art’s sake.” He considers the ultimate goal of landscape painting to be this very inner journey and the harmony of form with the essence of the formless spirit—or, as is famously quoted from him in his biographies, “contemplating the Dao” (guandao 觀道), which is achieved in a soteriological way as a result of “releasing the soul.” Thus, in his view, art is neither aimless nor is it necessarily moral and at the service of the cultivation of society in the Confucian sense. To regard all of his subtle Daoist allusions merely as a garb worn over Buddhism, and to forcefully link each of these allusions one by one to implausible Buddhist terms and concepts, is an obvious injustice to the original intent of this text.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declares no conflict of interest regarding this study.

References List

- Bush, S. (1983). Tsung Ping’s Essay on Painting Landscape and the ‘Landscape Buddhism’ of Mount Lu. In S. Bush & C. Murck (Eds.), *Theories of the Arts in China*. Princeton University Press, 132-64.
- Bush, S. (2004). The Essay on Painting by Wang Wei (415–453) in Context. In Z. Cai (Ed.) *Chinese Aesthetics The Ordering of Literature, The Arts, and the Universe in the Six Dynasties*. University of Hawai’i Press, 60-80.
- Bush, S., & Shih, HS. (1985). *Early Chinese Texts on*

Painting. Harvard-Yenching Institute.

- Coomaraswamy, A. (1934). *The Transformation of Nature in Art*. Dover Publications.
- Confucius. (2011). *Lunyu* 論語 [The Analects]. Chinese Text Project. <https://ctext.org/analects/>
- Dongfang, SH. (2004). “Hai nei shi zhou ji 海內十洲記” [Record of the Ten Continents Within the Seas]. In *Zhonghua Daozang* 中華道藏 [Zhonghua Daoist Canon]. Huaxia Publishing House, 48, 75–79.
- Du, G. (2004). Daode Zhenjing Guangshengyi 道德真經廣聖義 [Comprehensive Exposition of the Sacred Meaning of the Daode Zhenjing]. In *Zhonghua Daozang* 中華道藏 [The Compiled Daoist Canon]. Huaxia Publishing House, 9, 558–833.
- Huang, SH., & Zhang, SH. (2016). *Zhouyi Yizhu* 周易譯注 [Translation and Commentary of the Book of Changes]. Shanghai Guji Publishing House 上海古籍.
- Laozi. (2004). *Daode Zhenjing* 道德真經 [The True Scripture of the Dao and Its Virtue (Original Daozang Version)]. In *Zhonghua Daozang* 中華道藏 [The Compiled Daoist Canon]. Huaxia Publishing House, 9, 36–44.
- Li, Y. 李延壽. (1975). *Nan Shi* 南史. Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, Beijing.
- Michael, TH. (2012). *The Pristine Dao: Metaphysics in Early Daoist Discourse*. State University of New York Press.
- Radpour, E. (2021). Heavenly Paradise of Kunlun in Daoism. *Sophia Perennis*, 17(2), 179–202. <https://doi.org/10.22034/iw.2020.256599.1471>
- Radpour, E. (2023). *Laozi's Daodejing* (3rd ed.). Everydaylife Publication.
- Shen, Y. 沈約. (1974). *Song shu* 宋書. Zhonghua shuju 中華書局.
- Sullivan, M. (1967). *The Arts of China*. University of California Press.
- Wang, B. (2004). Daode Zhenjing 道德真經 [The True Scripture of the Dao and Its Virtue]. In *Zhonghua Daozang* 中華道藏 [The Compiled Daoist Canon]. Huaxia Publishing House, 9, 192–219.
- Wang, B. (n.d.). *Zhouyi Lueli* 周易略例 [General Remarks on the Changes]. Yixue Wang 易學網. <https://www.eee-learning.com/book/wangbeoo>
- Xie, H. (2011). *Guhua Pinlu* 古畫品錄 [The Classification of Old Painters]. Chinese Text Project. <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&res=244595>
- Xu, SH. (2011). *Shuowen Jiezi* 說文解字 [Explaining Graphs and Clarifying Characters]. Chinese Text Project. <https://ctext.org/shuo-wen-jie-zi>
- Ye, F. (1965). *Hou Han shu* 後漢書. Zhonghua shuju 中華書局.
- Zhang, Y. (1936). *Lidai Minghua Ji* 歷代名畫記 [Records of Famous Paintings of All Dynasties]. Commercial Press 商務印書館.
- Zhuangzi. (2004). *Nanhua Zhenjing* 南華真經 [The True Scripture of Nanhua (Original Daozang Version)]. In *Zhonghua Daozang* 中華道藏 [The Compiled Daoist Canon]. Huaxia Publishing House, 13, 1–64.

COPYRIGHTS

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with publication rights granted to journal of Art and Civilization of the Orient. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).



HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

Radpour, E. (2026). The Charm of the Dao in Chinese Painting (A Re-examination of Zong Bing's Preface on Landscape Painting). *Journal of Art & Civilization of the Orient*, 14(53), 60–75.

DOI: [10.22034/jaco.2026.567535.1513](https://doi.org/10.22034/jaco.2026.567535.1513)

URL: https://www.jaco-sj.com/article_248095.html?lang=en

