# PAINTING OUTSIDE THE LINES:

# HOW DAOISM SHAPED CONCEPTIONS OF ARTISTIC EXCELLENCE IN MEDIEVAL CHINA, 800–1200

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Though the work on this thesis was largely carried out between 2010–2012, my interest in the religious aspects of Chinese painting began several years prior. In the fall of 2007, my mentor Professor Poul Andersen introduced me to his research into the inspirational relationship between Daoist ritual and religious painting in the case of Wu Daozi, the most esteemed Tang dynasty painter of religious art. Taken by a newfound fascination with this topic, I began to explore the pioneering translations of Chinese painting texts for a graduate seminar on ritual theory, and in them I found a world of potential material ripe for analysis within the framework of religious studies. I devoted the following two years to intensive Chinese language study in Taiwan, where I had the fortuitous opportunity to make frequent visits to view the paintings on exhibit at the National Palace Museum in Taipei. Once I had acquired the ability to work through primary sources, I returned to Honolulu to continue my study of literary Chinese and begin my exploration into the texts that ultimately led to the central discoveries within this thesis.

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**Abbreviations and Conventions**

*DZ*. When referring to works in the Ming-era Daoist canon (*Zhengtong daozang*), I cite them by the abbreviation *DZ*, followed by the catalogue number assigned to them in the *Daozang tongkao* 道藏通考 (see next entry) and the title of the work in italics. When citing particular passages, I cite them by *juan* and page number, followed by the letters a and b to indicate recto and verso sides of folio pages.

*DZTK*. Kristofer M.Schipper and Franciscus Verellen, eds. *The Taoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the Daozang*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

*EOT*. *Encyclopedia of Daoism* (two-volume collection), ed. Fabrizio Pregadio. UK: Routledge, 2008.

*GHPL*. *Guhua pinlu* 古畫品錄 (*Classification Record of Ancient Painters*) by Xie He 謝赫, sixth century. Beijing: Renmin meishu chuban she, 1959.

*GCHB*. *Guangchuan huaba* 廣川畫跋 (*Dong You's Colophons on Paintings*) by Dong You 董逌, circa 1120. In *Shiwan juan lou congshu*, volume 8. Taipei: Yiwen Yinshuguan, 1968.

*HSCS*. *Huashi congshu* 畫史叢書 (*Collection of Painting Histories*), Yu Anlan [Haiyan] 于安瀾 [海晏], ed., Taipei: Wenshi zhe chuban she, 1974. Four volumes.

*LDMHJ*. *Lidai minghua ji* 歷代名畫記 (*Record of Celebrated Painters from Successive Dynasties)* by Zhang Yanyuan 張顏遠, ca. 847. In Yu Jianhua 俞劍華, ed., *Lidai minghua ji*. Shanghai: Renmin meishu chuban she, 1960.

*LQGZ*. *Linquan gaozhi* 林泉高致 (*Lofty Ambitions in Forests and Streams*) by Guo Xi 郭熙, compiled by his son Guo Si 郭思 circa 1117. In *ZGHLLB* (see below).

*TCMHL*. *Tangchao minghua lu* 唐朝名畫錄 (*Record of Celebrated Painters of the Tang Dynasty*) by Zhu Jingxuan 朱景玄, ca. 840. In Wen Zhaotong 溫肇桐, ed., *Tangchao minghua lu*. Chengdu: Sichuan meishu chuban she, 1985.

*THJWZ*. *Tuhua jianwen zhi* 圖畫見聞誌 (*Record of Things Seen and Heard about Painting*) by Guo Ruoxu 郭若虛 circa 1080 or earlier. Taiwan: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1934.

*YZMHL*. *Yizhou minghua lu* 益州名畫錄 (*Record of Celebrated Painters from Yizhou*) by Huang Xiufu 黃休復, circa 1006. In *HSCS*, volume 3, p. 1374–1432.

*XHHP*. *Xuanhe huapu* 宣和畫布 (*Painting Catalogue of the Xuanhe Era*). In HSCS, volume 1, p. 357–641.

*ZGHLLB*. *Zhongguo hualun leibian* 中國畫論類編 (*Categorical Compilation of Chinese Painting Theory)*, compiled by Yu Jianhua 俞劍華, ed., 1956.

# Introduction

> An artist earns the right to call himself a creator only when he admits to himself that he is but an instrument. - Henry Miller[1]

One place religious traditions lend themselves to a better understanding of artistic creativity is where they throw light on the question of what it means to create in the first place. In all its cultural manifestations, a particularly fascinating expression of the intricate and interwoven relationship between religion and creativity appears in the prolific theoretical treatises of traditional Chinese painting. This thesis discusses the role of Daoism in the formulation and eventual exaltation of the "untrammeled category" (*yipin* 逸品) of painters of the Tang (618–906) and Song (960–1279) dynasties as an example of this phenomenon.[2]

The theory of painting took a dramatic turn in the Northern Song (960–1127), particularly in the eleventh century. An influential art theorist and Daoist alchemist, Huang Xiufu 黃休復 (late tenth to early eleventh century), in collaboration with other contemporary theorists from Sichuan province, reinvented the theoretical standard by making adjustments to the gradational classification of painters inherited from previous

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1. Henry Miller, *The Time of the Assassins: A Study of Rimbaud* (London and Melbourne: Quartet, 1984), 138.
2. As used in painting theory, the translation of the character *yi* 逸 as "untrammeled" derives from two of its meanings: to be "at ease, relaxed;" and "to escape," which refers to its usage in the binomial *yinyi* 隱逸, or "recluse" (see page 11). Because the *yipin* manner of painting is free in its action and unrestricted, I find the conventional English translation of "untrammeled" the most accurate, though it loses the "recluse" connotation of the Chinese.

works of traditional painting criticism.[3] This theoretical move confirmed that a new ideal for artistic excellence in painting had emerged by the eleventh century, one that held spontaneous (*ziran* 自然) expression as the ultimate desideratum. This thesis problematizes the historical causes for the generation and perpetuation of this new trend in Northern Song painting theory. Through a detailed exegetical analysis of painting texts written from the ninth to eleventh centuries, I argue that the eleventh century elevation of the *yipin* class of painters developed in response to a growing intellectual interest in the Daoist textual tradition and its application to aesthetic theory.

My argument challenges the claims of previous scholarship that painters and art theorists of the Song looked primarily toward philosophical and religious systems other than Daoism for their ideas about art. In one famous work of this kind, James Cahill argues that, by the Song, Daoist concepts had become "so thoroughly assimilated into Confucian thought that the Sung scholars had no need to turn to other sources for them."[4] Some scholars in the last couple of decades have also argued for the prominence of Neo-Confucian thought in Northern Song aesthetic theory.[5] However, as Peter Bol has demonstrated more recently, the cumulative intellectual tradition known in Western language scholarship as Neo-Confucianism did not become central to literati life until the twelfth century; therefore, referring to the many developing philosophies prior to the time

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3. Shūjirō Shimada, "Concerning the I-P'In Style of Painting: Part I," *Oriental Art* 7 (1961), 73.
4. James Cahill, "Confucian Elements in the Theory of Painting," in *The Confucian Persuasion*, ed. Arthur F. Wright (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960), 135.
5. Three of the most notable works which draw connections between painting theory and Neo-Confucianism are two similar book chapters by Wen Fong and one by John Hay. See: Wen Fong, *Beyond Representation* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992)., *Possessing the Past: Treasures From the National Palace Museum, Taipei (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1996).*, and John Hay, "Construction and Insertion of Self in Song and Yuan Painting," in *Self as Image in Asian Theory and Practice*, ed. Roger T. Ames (Albany: State University of New York, 1998).

of Zhu Xi (1130–1200) as "Neo-Confucianism" elides the nuances between traditions that "can include diverse, even contradictory practices."[6] Though some aspects of nascent philosophies that would later be compiled and codified by Zhu Xi may indeed have influenced painting theory to some degree, each of these studies has overlooked the more pivotal impact of the contemporaneous Daoist tradition on the formation of new theoretical models of painting in the Tang and Northern Song dynasties.

Serious study of the links between Daoism and painting has only begun recently. Sarah Fraser has suggested that the reluctance of scholars to address the relationship between Daoist thought and painting theory, and their subsequent reorientation toward Confucian and Neo-Confucian elements, may have been in response to the foregrounding of Daoism in less scholarly books, most notably Mai-mai Sze's *The Tao of Painting* (1956), that treat Chinese painting in an inchoate and ahistorical way.[7] Additionally, there is the question of the greater prestige of Confucianism, another factor which may have drawn scholarly inquiry away from Daoism. In my own research, I have been inspired by Professor Fraser's encouraging words to scholars who might build on her work: "Despite the negative associations of popular conceptions of Daoism, alchemical notions of creativity, [sic.] and conceptions of invention are worth another look."[8]

Indeed, an examination of the vocabulary, allusions, and conceptual framework of Northern Song painting texts and a comparison of these aspects with texts from the

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6. Peter K. Bol, “Neo-Confucianism in History,” (2008), 79.
7. Sarah Fraser, *Performing the Visual: The Practice of Buddhist Wall Painting in China and Central Asia, 618–960* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 292.
8. Sarah Fraser, *Performing the Visual: The Practice of Buddhist Wall Painting in China and Central Asia, 618–960*, 292.

Daoist canon reveals a remarkable connection between the Daoist religion and contemporary ideas of artistic creativity. My research has been carried out largely with the assistance of searchable databases of digital Chinese texts, most notably Academia Sinica's *Scripta Sinica*, which has streamlined the investigative process, especially with the task of searching for Daoist terms and allusions in painting texts. What follows is an investigation of intellectual history which reconstructs the close relationship between Daoism and the theory of painting from circa 800–1200. By looking closely at the religious terms and concepts present within the painting theory of this period, we find that the religion of Daoism not only led to the invention and elevation of the *yipin* class of painters, but that several fundamental components of Daoist thought ultimately become central to how the most prominent art theorists articulated the processes behind human creativity.

# Chapter 1. Inspiration of the Immortals: Zhang Zhihe and the First Untrammeled Painters

Prior to the ninth century, conventional painting theory divided artists up into three ranks (*pin* 品) according to their relative merits. First appearing during the Six Dynasties period, this way of classifying painters derived from lively critical discussions of personal qualities (*renpin* 人品), a trend which began at the end of the Eastern Han. As with discussions of calligraphy and poetry, authors of painting criticism determined the artistic value of individual painters and assigned to them positions within the traditional "Three Classes and Nine Grades" (*sanpin jiudeng* 三品九等) classification system, which was originally formulated as a way of ranking officials. This framework took the form of three broad divisions of upper, middle, and lower, and each of these were subdivided into three grades, also upper, middle, and lower. Near the beginning of the Tang dynasty (618–960), the writer Zhang Huaiguan 張懷瓘 (active first half of eighth century) reassigned to the upper divisions the terms "divine, wondrous, and competent" (*shen* 神, *miao* 妙, and *neng* 能), which remained integral to traditional painting criticism for the remainder of its history.[9]

In determining the relative excellence of a painter, Six Dynasties art critics judged how successfully the artist had grasped the Six Laws of Painting established by the sixth century theorist Xie He 謝赫. The establishment of the six laws allowed art critics to systematically rate artists according to a universal standard. The laws can also be

9. Shūjirō Shimada, “Concerning the I-P‘In Style of Painting: Part I,” 66.

understood as methods (both are meanings of the Chinese term *fa* 法), skills toward which a painter should strive in the production of art, such as the rendering of forms and colors in accordance with formal likeness, the applying proper brush technique, and most importantly, the engendering the painting with vitality (*qiyun* 氣韻). Though there are six laws of painting, Xie He claimed that artists typically only excelled in one or two, and rarely achieved success in all six.[10] According to Xie He, prior to the time of his writing in the sixth century, "only Lu Tanwei [5th century] and Wei Xie [late 3rd-early 4th century] were thoroughly proficient in all of these [methods]."[11] The degree to which a painter mastered the six methods governed his position in the traditional ranking system, and most artists adhered to the conventions set up by this system. But there were also those who did not.

The *yipin* classification entered into ninth-century painting discourse because three famous painters did not fit the typical mold. Known for a swift and expressionistic mode of painting that occasionally involved music, dance, and the use of non-traditional instruments in the creative act, the original *yipin* painters "did not adhere to the usual methods" (*buju changfa* 不拘常法) and lay outside the ranks of the traditional ranking of painters, partly because of their unusual and unorthodox manner of producing paintings.[12] The other part of the rationale to place these three painters in a class of their own was the extraordinary artistic quality of their work. That their superb finished paintings came into being as a result of an extraordinary and impromptu artistic performance led their

10. *GHPL.*
11. *GHPL.*
12. *TCMHL.*

contemporaries to attribute to these painters magical powers, believing their paintings to be miraculous works. For example, in the brief biography of Wang Mo 王墨 (eighth century), one of the first three *yipin* painters, we read that "his hand responded to his thoughts as swiftly as the process of shaping-and-transforming (*zaohua* 造化)... [and] it was just like the work of spirits. Looking upon [his work], one could not see any trace of ink, [and] everyone called it a miracle."[13]

Zhu Jingxuan 朱景玄 (ninth century) was the first to our knowledge to have delineated what it meant to be an "untrammeled" painter.[14] This he does in his *Record of Celebrated Painters of the Tang Dynasty, Tangchao minghua lu* 唐朝名畫錄, one of the two main sources for the history of Chinese painting during the Tang.[15] In the preface to the text, Zhu explains his classification system: "For my basic classification, I have used the three categories, divine (*shen* 神), wondrous (*miao* 妙), and capable (*neng* 能), that were established by Zhang Huaiguan in his *Opinions on the Evaluation of Painters, Huapin duan* 畫品斷.[16] Zhu goes on to explain that he has maintained the traditional division of these three categories into the long-established sub-categories of top, middle, and bottom, and then concludes with a sentence explaining his introduction of a new category of painters: "Since there are some men who fall outside this system by not subscribing to any orthodox rules, I have added an 'untrammeled category' (*yipin* 逸品) in order to discuss their relative merits."[17] At the very end of the text, following his final

13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. The *Tangchao minghua lu* is the second most important source of painting history, second only to Zhang Yanyuan's *Lidai minghua ji*.
16. Shūjirō Shimada, "Concerning the I-P'in Style of Painting: Part I," 66.
17. *TCMHL*.

section which describes the three *yipin* painters, Zhu offers a few more words to expand on his definition: "This is not the original method [of painting]" (非畫之本法 ).[18] In sum, Zhu's denotation is based on the painters' unorthodox technique of painting; it tells of an aberrant method set in opposition to the first three styles which adhered to ordinary painting methods.[19] His definition is rather ambiguous and leaves the question of the grounds on which painters should be considered *yipin* unanswered, and therefore we must supplement his given definition with further information based on the descriptions he offers of the three painters he has placed in this category.

From his descriptions of the three painters, it is clear that Zhu regarded them very highly; so highly, in fact, that he reserved for them some of the most praiseful words found in his entire text. Though the category of *yipin* would not reach the top of the hierarchy of painters until the eleventh century, Zhu—writing in the ninth century—considered them to be among the most worthy of acclaim.[20] The fact that he praises the *yipin* painters probably derives from the original formulation of the term by Li Sizhen 李嗣真 (eighth century), a calligraphy critique and the first author we know to have used the term *yipin* in aesthetic criticism. Li's definition of *yipin* in calligraphy delineated a superlative, innate talent which could not be contained within the general framework of the Three Classes and Nine Grades. While Zhu Jingxuan speaks highly of the *yipin* painters, his definition of the class instead emphasizes their unorthodox methods over their comparative excellence in relation to artists of other classes. He places into his *yipin*

18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.

category three painters for whom our received knowledge varies tremendously: Zhang Zhihe 張志和 (ca. 730–810), Wang Mo 王墨 (ca. 699–759), and Li Lingsheng 李靈昇 (active early ninth century).[21] In the pages to follow, I argue that the ninth century art theorist Zhu Jingxuan and his contemporaries conceived of the *yipin* category as a predominantly Daoist classification and held the painter Zhang Zhihe, the most famous among the first three *yipin* painters, as the standard. An examination of Zhang Zhihe provides a blueprint of the Daoist personality traits that came to characterize all three of the *yipin* painters of the Tang and the single *yipin* painter of the Song.

## The Life and Painting of Zhang Zhihe

The *Record of Celebrated Painters of the Tang Dynasty*, the first ninth-century text to discuss Zhang Zhihe's paintings, describes his talent in naturalistic representation yet says nothing of his "unorthodox" methods:[22]

> Early in his career the then Governor of Wuxing, Duke Yan of Lu, sent him a present of five fisherman's poems, in recognition of the nobility of his nature. Zhang thereupon did hand scrolls to accompany the verses. He showed human figures, boats, birds and beasts, mist and waves, wind and moon, all in accordance with the text and rendered so as to bring out their subtleties to the full. So profound was its mastery of outward appearance that it became the standard of elegance for its period.[23]
>
> 初顏魯公典吳興, 知其高節, 以漁歌五首贈之. 張乃為卷軸, 隨句賦象, 人物, 舟船, 鳥獸, 煙波, 風月, 皆依其文, 曲盡其妙, 為世之雅律, 深得其態.

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21. In his text *Record of Celebrated Painters from Yizhou, Yizhou minghua lu* 益州名畫錄 art theorist Huang Xiufu raises the status of the *yipin* painters from a class "outside the ranks" to the highest position, above the Divine Class. This topic is central to the discussion in Chapter Three.
22. To the best of our knowledge, the *Tangchao minghua lu* predates the *Lidai minghua ji* by approximately seven years, and I am not aware of any earlier painting text that includes Zhang Zhihe. I am following the dating provided by Susan Bush (1985).
23. *TCMHL*. Translation adapted from Alexander Soper, "T'ang Ch'ao Ming Hua Lu: Celebrated Painters of the T'ang Dynasty By Chu Ching-Hsuan of T'ang," *Artibus Asiae* 21 (1958), 229.

With this, we are left to wonder what about his style led him to be placed among the untrammeled class. There is nothing particularly "unorthodox" in this account of Zhang Zhihe; by contrast, this same text tells us about the *yipin* painter Wang Mo (above), a master of "spattered-ink" painting (*pomo hua* 潑墨畫), who painted with his hands and feet.[24] I therefore turn to other contemporary sources to determine what exactly led to Zhang Zhihe's placement in the *yipin* class.

Zhang Zhihe was a prominent Daoist practitioner and author whose various biographies tell us he was famous as a recluse, a fisherman, and, ultimately, an immortal. His name appears in approximately ten texts within the Daoist canon (*Daozang* 道藏), including one text attributed to his pen known as the *Master of the Obscure Reality, Xuanzhenzi* 玄真子, a name which also doubled as his epithet.[25] Several volumes in Tang and Song histories record biographies for Zhang, making him the most well-known of the first three *yipin* painters. Nearly all of them include his miraculous birth story, wherein his mother dreamt that a maple tree sprouted in her womb just prior to his birth.[26] Originally from Jinhua in Wuzhou prefecture, Zhang was a young man of exceptional intelligence. Already well-versed in the Classics at the age of 16, Zhang earned a high position in the Hanlin Academy, only to be later demoted for an unknown reason, which forced him to take up a post on the bank of the Wei river.[27] After serving there for several years, he decided to retire from political life. Setting up his residence near the river, he began to call himself the "Angler of the Misty Waters," another one of his epithets which,

24. Ibid.
25. *DZ* 296: *Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian*, 36.4b.
26. *Xintangshu* (Shanghai: Zhonghua Shuju, 1936), 196.8.
27. *DZ* 781: *Xuanpin lu*, 4.26a.

by this time, conveyed a meaning permeated with Daoist connotations.[28] One biography in the *Daozang* tells us that each time he set out to fish, he would purposefully not use bait because "his aspirations were not in [catching] fish" (志不在魚).[29] Rather, Zhang enjoyed their company; apart from society, he spent his days communing with the natural world. One of his closest friends was the scholar and famous calligrapher Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿 (708–784), with whom Zhang often shared wine and composed and sang songs.[30]

Zhang's affinity towards Daoism may have derived initially from the influence of his father, who is said to have written commentaries on several classics of Daoist philosophy.[31] Zhang's own book, the *Xuanzhenzi*, was originally reported to contain 12 *juan* and 30,000 characters; however, the extant version in the *Daozang* is composed of only about 7,000, and it is not clear whether it is a fragment of the original, longer text, or a supplement to it.[32] While some sources question whether the original 12 *juan* version could have been written by a single author, the larger tradition attributes the surviving text to his name. Zhang's biographies also report that he wrote 15 essays on the *Yijing*, which do not survive.[33]

Biographies within the Daoist canon reveal that Zhang's eccentric personality and inventive methods of painting are the likely factors that prompted Zhu Jingxuan to place him into the *yipin* class. Given his comparative fame when compared with both Wang Mo and Li Lingsheng (the other two Tang *yipin* painters), it seems quite plausible that Zhu

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28. Perhaps the earliest tale of a Daoist "fisherman-sage" appears in *Zhuangzi*, Chapter 31.
29. *DZ* 296: *Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian*, 36.4b; *Xintangshu*, (Shanghai: Zhonghua Shuju, 1936), 196.8.
30. *Xintangshu* (Shanghai: Zhonghua Shuju, 1936), 196.8.
31. *DZ* 781: *Xuanpin lu*, 4.26a.
32. Kwong Hing Foon, *DZTK*, s.v. "Xuanzhen Zi Waipian."
33. *DZ* 781: *Xuanpin lu*, 4.26a.

Jingxuan took Zhang Zhihe as the blueprint personality of the class, and that the other painters subsequently fit into that framework. Indeed, the use of the term *yipin* 逸品 in describing the class, with its etymological connection to the *yinyi* 隱逸 (or "recluse") classification in contemporary personal biographies, also seems to have its basis in the personal history of Zhang Zhihe, who featured prominently in these records as a famous recluse.[34] Moreover, the men who appear in the *yinyi* (also refered to as reclusive scholar, *yinshi* 隱士) sections of personal biographies from this period tend to have a Daoist bent, though the extent to which this is documented varies from person to person. One earlier source of personal biographies defines the term "recluse" as an exemplar of a Daoist sage according to the *Zhuangzi*:

> As for what the ancients have called a "recluse", it is not that he hides himself away and refuses to be seen, shuts off his words and refuses to speak out, nor does he conceal his wisdom and refuse to express it. Rather, [the recluse] feels indifferent to fame from his very core, he is neither clear nor abstruse, he is at peace with the times and dwells within the conformity of things, and in his relation to material things, he remains disinterested.[35]
>
> 古之所謂隱逸者, 非伏其身而不見也, 非閉其言而不出也, 非藏其智而不發 也. 蓋以恬淡為心, 不曒不昧, 安時處順, 與物無私者也.

However this might be, one could still argue that Zhu Jingxuan may have adopted the term *yipin* for the classification of painters by analogy to a recluse who lives "outside of society," and that he did not intend to convey an overt connection to Daoism. Yet, by the ninth century, using the character *yi* 逸 in designating a classification—of a painter, poet, or otherwise—would have necessarily carried with it a connection to Daoist notions of

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34. *Xintangshu* (Shanghai: Zhonghua Shuju, 1936), 196.8.
35. *Weishu* (Taipei: Shijie Shuju, 1988) 90.14. Thanks to Professor David McCraw for his help with the translation of *anshi chuxun* 安時處訓, which alludes to the third chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, titled "Nourishing Life" ("Yangsheng" 養生). See *DZ* 670: *Nanhua zhenjing*, 1.15b.

reclusion and unconventionality. Furthermore, evidence from Zhang Zhihe's biographies in the *Daozang* seem to verify that he was the pivotal figure in the formation of the *yipin* classification.

The account from the *Daozang* of Zhang's ascent to Heaven confirms his fame as both a painter and a Daoist immortal, and suggests that his religious practices contributed to his remarkable talent in the art of painting. It recalls the biography of Zhang Zhihe written by Zhu Jingxuan in his *Record of Celebrated Painters of the Tang Dynasty*, and introduces the crucial elements of rapidity and performance which Zhu Jingxuan leaves out of his rendition. As the story goes, Yan Zhenqing gathered some people together to share drinks, sing songs, and compose lyrics to old fisherman songs. Zhihe was the first to finish, and his song was so beautiful his friends wrote the lyrics out in calligraphy and gave the finished composition to him as a reward for winning the impromptu poetry competition. Just at the moment Zhihe saw the calligraphy, he responded by creating a special work of art that would be treasured for the ages, and some time thereafter, he "ascended to Heaven in broad daylight" (*bairi shengtian* 白日昇天):[36]

> [Upon seeing the calligraphy of his fishing song], Zhihe arranged his paints, cut the silk, and painted the scenery between the lyrics, and in an instant (*xuyu* 須臾) completed five paintings of trees, birds, fish, mountains, and rivers—with the traces of the brush all unsurpassably wonderful. It was unparalleled in both ancient and modern times, and Yan Zhenqing and all those who circulated the painting continued to gasp in admiration ceaselessly.
>
> After that, Zhenqing traveled east to Pingwang station. There he saw Zhihe flushed with wine and playing around in the water. Zhihe laid a mat on top of the water, and sat upon it, drinking, pouring wine,

36. The expresion *bairi shengtian* is common in Daoist texts to describe the most superior form of transcendence. See Fabrizio Pregadio, *Encyclopedia of Taoism*, ed. Fabrizio Pregadio (UK, Routledge: 2008), s.v. "Lianxing."

> laughing, and singing. His mat moved back and forth, moving slow, then fast, all the while making the sound of a boat being pulled through the water. Clouds formed around him and a crane was flying above. Among Zhenqing and all in attendance, there was not one who was not astonished. From atop the water, Zhang waved goodbye and thanked Zhenqing, then he rose up to the sky—and vanished. Today, only his treasured [paintings] still circulate in the world.[37]
>
> 而志和命丹青剪素, 寫景夾詞, 須臾成五本,華木禽魚,山水景色,奇絕踪跡. 今古無倫而真卿與諸賔客傳翫, 嘆服不已.
>
> 其後真卿東遊平望驛.志和酒酣,為戲水, 鋪席於水上, 獨坐飲酌, 笑詠其席, 來去遲速,如刺舟聲. 復有雲鶴隨覆其上. 真卿親賔參佐觀者, 莫不驚異. 尋於水上揮手以謝真卿, 上昇而去. 今猶傳寶在人間者.

Part of the spectacular nature of Zhang's ability and the reason people attributed immortal qualities to him lie in the rapid speed with which he produced such beautiful images. Though not the sole requisite for placement into the *yipin* class, rapidity seems to have been a common characteristic for these types of painters. Zhu Jingxuan similarly praises Wang Mo for painting "as swiftly as the process of shaping-and-transforming (*shuruo zaohua* 倏若造化)."[38] As Shūjirō Shimada has also discussed, the *yipin* painter's process was believed to be similar to natural creation because it could bring things into existence both quickly and without effort.[39] Therefore, art theorists such as Zhu Jingxuan reported that the forms the *yipin* painters generated possessed the same quality of objects rising out of natural creation.

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37. *DZ* 296: *Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian*, 36.5a-b. Thanks to Professor Kate Lingley for her help with this translation.
38. *TCMHL*.
39. Shūjirō Shimada, “Concerning the I-P‘in Style of Painting: Part I,” 69.

Figure 1: An illustration of Zhang Zhihe's ascension taken from a reprint of the Ming dynasty collection of woodblock prints titled the *Complete Biography of Immortals, Liexian quanzhuan* 列仙全傳.[40]

40. Wang Shizhen 王世真 (1526–1590), ed., *Complete Biography of Immortals, Liexian quanzhuan* 列仙全傳 (Shijiazhuang Shi : Hebei mei shu chu ban she, 1996), 150. See Figure 1 in the Images and Charts section for a full-page image,

An earlier section of the same biography in the *Daozang* speaks to Zhang's fondness for drinking, which we met already in the above passage. As early as the late third century, this proclivity had become associated with the Daoist paradigm of unconventionality, and later became connected with methods of breath control:[41]

> Zhihe was good at painting—and drinking. He could drink thirty liters of brew without being drunk. He retained True Reality within himself and cultivated his vital breath, to the point that he could lay in snow without getting cold and jump in water without getting wet.[42]
>
> 志和善畫飲酒, 三斗不醉. 守真養氣, 臥雪不寒, 入水不濡.

This passage leads to several points of discussion that corroborate my argument that Zhu Jingxuan and his contemporaries conceived of the *yipin* category as a predominantly Daoist

classification and held Zhang Zhihe as the standard. Firstly, with regard to the passage above, it is necessary to mention that at this time in China, drinking was thought to aid in the process of transcending distinctions and discursive thoughts, and thereby was able to bring a person closer to reality, rather than being a means of escape. It was believed that the effects of alcohol induced altered states of consciousness similar to forms of meditation described by early Daoist sages; thus it was thought to move the person into a state of complete presence and absorption into the moment, the "here and now."

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41. Zhang Yanyuan 張顏遠 makes a similar connection between alcohol and breath control in his description of Wu Daozi 吳道子 in the *Record of Famous Painters from Successive Dynasties, Lidai minghua ji* 歷代名畫記. In Zhang's words: "[Wu Daozi] liked to drink wine in order to exercise his vital breath. Whenever he was about to pick up his brush, he had to become intoxicated" (好酒使氣, 每欲揮毫, 必須酣飲). Thanks to Professor Poul Andersen for his work on these translations. For a more detailed discussion on Wu Daozi, see pages 37–40.
42. *DZ* 296: *Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian*, 36.5a. The phrase *rushui buru* 入水不濡 is an allusion to the sixth chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, "Da Zongshi," which refers to the qualities of someone who is able to "climb up to the Way," thus able to "climb high without becoming afraid, enter water without getting wet, and enter fire without getting hot." See *DZ* 670: *Nanhua zhenjing*, 2.1a-b.

After the dissolution of the Han empire in the third century, the Chinese intelligentsia became more interested both in Daoism and in heightened states of awareness, and a burgeoning drinking culture thus emerged. One well-known piece of poetry by the fourth century poet Tao Qian 陶潛 (365–427), for example, praises the virtues of wine for its ability to allow people to move beyond stifling hierarchical social roles:

> My good friends all appreciate my tastes,
> With drinking pitchers in hand, everyone comes together.
> We clear the brambles and sit in the shade of a pine,
> And after a few rounds, how soon we become loose.
> All the elders speak out of order, our cups poured out of turn.
> When we are no longer consciously aware that "we" have our own "me,"
> How can we know that things have more or less value?
> We were loose and leisurely, lost within where we were,
> Within wine, there is profound meaning.[43]
>
> 故人賞我挈, 壺相與至.
> 班荊坐松下, 數斟已復醉.
> 父老雜亂言, 觴酌失行次.
> 不覺知有我, 安知物為貴.
> 悠悠迷所留, 酒中有深味.

Tao Qian calls this phenomenon "the deep meaning within wine," making a connection between the words for "flavor" (*wei* 味) and "meaning" (*yiwei* 意味), thus referring to the quality of alcohol that produces a state of mind where one no longer perceives him or herself as separate from the universe. The words used to describe this state of mind (*bujue zhi you wo* 不覺知有我) allude to the enlightenment of the sages within the *Zhuangzi*, which the passage then connects to the "flavor" of the wine. Un-stifled, the

43. Tao Qian, "Drinking Songs," in *Tao Yuanming Juan, Gudian Wenxue Yanjiu Ziliao Huibian* (Shanghai: Zhonghua Shuju, 1965), 152. For this translation, I have opted to translate *jiu* as "brew" to maintain the historical context of this early text. During Tao Qian's lifetime, alcoholic drinks were made by fermenting grains, not fruit. I use "wine" in translations from the Tang and later, when fermented fruit beverages became more prevalent.

Daoist sage "flushed with wine" (*jiuhan* 酒酣) entered an altered state of consciousness which brought him closer toward his goal of becoming a *zhenren* 真人, a Real Person. As one might imagine, such an inspired and uninhibited state attracted artists, and in subsequent centuries poets and painters continued to praise alcohol for its assistance in the creative process. Though the notion of inebriated artistic inspiration would eventually reach the mainstream and exist without direct ties to Daoism, at this time in the Tang dynasty it still seems to have been closely linked with the religion.

The two other *yipin* painters of the Tang, Wang Mo and Li Lingsheng, were likewise known for drinking in preparation to paint. This, among other aspects of their styles, suggests that Zhu Jingxuan considered them to be painting in a Daoist mode. In his discussion of Wang Mo, Jerome Silbergeld explicitly labels Wang Mo as a Daoist[44] and then refers to one of the more well-known lines from Zhu Jingxuan's description: "Once he was flushed with wine, he would splash ink onto the paper, laughing and singing all the while, pressing it with his feet and smearing it with his hands" (醺酣之後, 即以墨潑, 或笑或吟, 腳蹙手抹).[45] As for the other *yipin* painter, Li Lingsheng, Zhu Jingxuan reports that "his ideas were born only from wine," (但以酒生思 ).[46] Curiously, in his brief biography of Zhang Zhihe (above), Zhu Jingxuan does not mention his proclivity for drinking, and instead simply mentions his artistic skill. Likewise, in his section on Wu Daozi 吳道子 (c.689–c.758), who had a reputation for "requiring" to be

44. Jerome Silbergeld, *Chinese Painting Style: Media, Methods, and Principles of Form* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1982), 29.
45. *TCMHL*.
46. *TCMHL*.

drunk in order to paint,[47] Zhu Jingxuan does not mention this even once. It is not certain why Zhu Jingxuan would have left these details out for these painters. On the one hand, he may have omitted the point about intoxication for Wu Daozi in order to highlight this aspect for the *yipin* style. The fact that the contemporary compendium the *Record of Celebrated Painters from Successive Dynasties, Lidai minghua ji* 歷代名畫記 by Zhang Yanyuan 張顏遠 (c.815–after 875), makes frequent mention of Wu Daozi's ritualistic use of alcohol supports this possibility. On the other hand, however, why would he have left this detail out of Zhang Zhihe's biography? Could it be that this aspect of his personality was already well-known? Neither does Zhu Jingxuan mention Zhang's involvement as a Daoist. With the addition of the supplemental sources from the *Daozang*, it is clear that the use of alcohol in the creative process is a common thread among all three of the *yipin* painters in the Tang.

Zhang's biographies in the *Daozang* suggest that through his practices of interior self- cultivation, he reached the level of a Real Person, *zhenren* 真人, who, as first articulated in the *Zhuangzi*, could "enter water without getting wet."[48] It is important to note that the expression *shouzhen yangqi* 守真養氣, "to retain the real and cultivate the vital breath," very clearly conveys a practice-oriented type of Daoism. While numerous contemporary painters maintained interests in Daoist thought and unconventional ways of living, such as reclusion for example, Zhang fully embraced the pursuit of immortality. As a major component of the religious dimension of the Daoist tradition, the pursuit of immortality involved physical practices for appreciating and fully experiencing life on

47. Refer to note 35.
48. *DZ* 670: *Nanhua zhenjing*, 2.1a-b.

the one hand (immediate goal), and preserving and extending it on the other (ultimate goal). In a tangible sense, the Daoist paradigm of immortality conveys the notion that by retaining, or keeping close to, what is most real in the universe (the Dao), and by practicing methods of breath control to become more completely present, the practitioner experiences his or her life more completely and takes steps toward maintaining this level of awareness on a permanent basis.

Though there is no discussion of self-cultivation practices in Zhu Jingxuan's biographies of painters Li Lingsheng and Wang Mo, he does describe them as artists who followed their inspiration and lived in the moment. Wang Mo is said to have "traveled extensively through the rivers and lakes of the south, often painting landscapes" (多遊江湖間, 常畫山水),[49] which is suggestive of a Daoist bent similar to that of Zhang Zhihe's. With regard to Li Lingsheng, we hear that "whenever he was painting a screen and it failed to come out as he wanted, he would never force himself to go on" (每圖一障, 非其所欲, 不即強為也).[50] This calls to mind the Zhuangzian concept of "being at peace with the times and dwelling in the conformity of things" (安時而訓處)," mentioned above in the definition of "recluse," and serves to communicate Li Lingsheng's spontaneous (*ziran* 自然) method.[51]

Further exploration into the biography of Zhang Zhihe sheds more light on why he was called "untrammeled." As one of the pioneers of a truly spontaneous approach to painting, Zhang took his practice to unprecedented levels, where it begins to closely

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49. *TCMHL*.
50. Alexander Soper, "T'ang Ch'ao Ming Hua Lu: Celebrated Painters of the T'ang Dynasty By Chu Ching-Hsuan of T'ang," 228.
51. *DZ* 670: *Nanhua zhenjing*, 1.15b.

resemble performance art. Centuries before the Song literati began practicing spontaneous painting and poetry competitions, Zhang Zhihe was creating a soundtrack to his visual art:

> He loved painting landscapes. Flushed with wine, he would sometimes beat a drum and play the flute, making his brush dance and the ink fly, completing the landscape in time with the music.[52]
>
> 好畫山水. 酒酣, 或擊鼓吹笛, 舞筆飛墨, 應節而成.

Zhang's musical and playful approach to his creative process indicates a fondness for the musical arts characteristic of the Daoist tradition. As one scholar eloquently explains, "if ritual lies at the heart of the complex Taoist heritage of China, then music is its very soul."[53] Unseen, invisible, and with the power to stir the emotions, music has been seen by Daoists, since the Warring States, as close to the Dao. By embracing these acoustic elements, Zhang brings forth the painting from a deeper, more genuine part of his being, the part of himself closest to the Dao, and therefore the most real, and the most authentic. Wang Mo also had a musical component to his painting. His biography tells us that he would "sometimes laugh, and sometimes sing" (*huo xiao huo yin* 或笑或吟) as he splashed ink onto the painting with his hands and feet.[54]

## Understanding the Untrammeled Practice

If the gestural performance painter Jackson Pollock had travelled to Tang China, he would have found companions in the *yipin* painters. Untrammeled in his own right,

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52. *DZ* 781: *Xuanpin lu*, 4.26a; *Xintangshu*, (Shanghai: Zhonghua Shuju, 1936), 196.8. Thanks to Professor Kate Lingley for her help with this translation.
53. Judith Boltz, *Encyclopedia of Taoism*, ed. Fabrizio Pregadio (UK, Routledge: 2008), s.v. "Taoist music."
54. *TCMHL*.

Pollock became famous for an extremely spontaneous and performative approach to painting. The primary difference to keep in mind in making such a comparison, however, is that the first *yipin* painters painted real life, mostly landscapes, not abstract art. Because of the relative verisimilitude of their paintings and the unconventional methods by which they brought them about, people who observed the *yipin* painters considered them to have miraculous creative powers, comparable only to gods and immortals. In the minds of the ninth-century Chinese critics who wrote about these painters, such creativity was possible only through the intervention of supernatural powers.

It was exactly this combination of excellent artistry and a rapid and unusual manner of painting that connected the *yipin* painters to the Daoist tradition. Like the Daoist masters who practiced methods for refining their essence to resonate with that of the primordial Dao from which all shaping-and-transforming (*zaohua* 造化) began, the *yipin* painters similarly are said to have created directly from this source of potential energy. Because their images maintained a sense of naturalism, and because they created their images without effort (in fact, they laughed, sang, and played instruments!), it seemed to onlookers as if the forces of shaping-and-transforming were intervening in the artistic process. The concept of *zaohua* originated with the *Zhuangzi* and *Liezi* texts, and with the advent of a new trend in mysticism typically referred to as neiguan 內關, or "interior meditation," Daoists became more interested in the action of *zaohua* and its dynamic relationship in the realm of human beings.[55]

55. Isabelle Robinet, *Taoism: Growth of a Religion* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 203.

In fact, the final section on *yipin* in the *Record of Celebrated Painters of the Tang Dynasty*, Zhu Jingxuan uses the term *zaohua* in descriptions of two the three *yipin* painters. This is nearly half of the total times he uses it throughout his text, suggesting a link between the concept and the untrammeled technique. By comparison, his contemporary Zhang Yanyuan, living only a few provinces to the west, employs the term nine times throughout his text, mostly to describe those painters whom he considered exemplary.[56] Zhang Yanyuan, however, was not interested in creating a new classification system; instead he intended to create a dynastic history of all painters, relying on the earlier method of ranking established by Xie He 謝赫 (active 500–535). Could it have been that Zhu Jingxuan purposefully reserved the terms *jiu* 酒 and *zaohua* 造化 in order to assert their association with the *yipin* painters? Given the pervasive usage of both terms throughout the entire *Lidai minghua ji*, this seems to be a plausible explanation for their limited usages in Zhu Jingxuan's text. For Zhu Jingxuan, the concept of *zaohua* was intimately bound up in the *yipin* artistic process.

The creative actions of both Wang Mo and Li Lingsheng are compared to the dynamic force of *zaohua* in more or less the same fashion. As mentioned above, Wang Mo's hand responded to his thoughts "as swiftly as shaping-and-transforming" (*shu ruo zaohua* 倏若造化); Li Lingsheng, likewise, "attained an exceptional form that was in accordance with the work of shaping-and-transforming" (得非常之體, 符造化之功).[57]

The specific process that comprises the dynamic movement of *zaohua* forms the central cosmological component of the *Xuanzhenzi*, the book attributed to Zhang Zhihe.

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56. *LDMHJ*.
57. *TCMHL*.

Whether or not we accept Zhang as the genuine author, the attribution of his name to a book dealing largely with *zaohua* further establishes a link between this Daoist concept and the *yipin* mode of painting. The preface to the *Xuanzhenzi* begins by declaring that the purpose of the text is to pinpoint and articulate the precise origin of shaping-and-transforming:

> [Within] the jade void and the abstruse expanse, the floating wheel revolves around Qian, and the submerged disc gives float to Kun, a red luminescent ring surrounds Heaven completely, ascending one *jing* it becomes burning hot, descending by one *dou* it becomes cold. From this the four seasons circulate and all things in the universe move. This is the second [action] of shaping-and-transforming; however, this is not the beginning of shaping-and-transforming![58]
>
> 碧虛冥茫, 飄輪斡乎乾, 漱盤浮乎坤, 紅明環於天衢, 升井為炎，降斗為寒. 由是四時旋而萬物遷, 斯造化之亞矣, 然非造化之元哉.

The book refers to *zaohua* over sixty times, primarily in the first section, each time defining the main characteristics of its dynamic process.[59] The entire text is written in parable and reads in a similar fashion to Daoist classics such as the *Zhuangzi* and the *Liezi*. It consists primarily of dialogues and discussions on cosmological and philosophical subjects among fantastical characters. The three *juan* in the extant version have the following subtitles based on the opening words of each: 1) "Bixu 碧虛" (Blue Void); 2) "Yuezhuo 鸑 鷟" (Celestial Bird); and 3) "Tao zhiling 濤之靈" (Spirit of the Waves).[60] The content of the first section is written as a dialogue between two great Daoist masters. In the opening scene, the Master of the Vermillion Clouds 紅霞子 poses a question to the Master of the Blue Void 碧虛子: "As for the beginning of shaping-and-transforming and

58. *DZ* 1029: *Xuanzhen zi waipian*, 1.1a.
59. *DZ* 1029: *Xuanzhen zi waipian*.
60. Kwong Hing Foon, in *DZTK,* s.v. "Xuanzhen Zi Waipian."

the source of what is naturally-so, what is its form like? Xiaoyuan went to the Master's place to see it, did you hear?" Unable to contain himself, the Master of the Blue Void rises to the top of the Great Space to respond by singing the "Song of the Empty Cavern":

> So without any source—a spontaneous (self-so) absence.
> Transformed without fashioning—the beginning of shaping-and-transforming.[61]
> 無自而然, 自然之無. 無造而化, 造化之端.

The next passage clarifies the rather abstruse vocabulary by introducing explanatory terminology. The Master of the Blue Void explains that the first term, which we may call "so without any source" (*wuzi er ran* 無自而然), equates to the "obscure being" (*xuanran* 玄然). The second term, "coming into being without having been created," we are told, equates to "real transformation" (*zhenhua* 真化).[62] Further expanding on these terms, the Master of the Blue Void continues: "Reaching to the obscure and the real, without being obscure yet still obscuring, this is the Real Obscurity; without being real and yet still real, this is the Obscure Reality" (*xuanzhen* 玄真).[63] In simplified terms, the Obscure Reality denotes the automatic process by which *zaohua* creates and transforms; only without reliance on conscious effort can "real transformation" occur.

The content of the *Xuanzhenzi* betrays an author with a nuanced understanding of the multitudinous forces of shaping-and-transforming and the human ability to participate in them. By its association with Zhang Zhihe, we can conclude that he was deeply involved with the study of *zaohua*—and not simply "creation" on a rudimentary level, but the very subtle details of what one might call "dynamic potentiality." Always present yet

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61. *DZ* 1029: *Xuanzhen zi waipian*, 1.3a. Thanks to Professor David McCraw for his help with this translation.
62. *DZ* 1029: *Xuanzhen zi waipian*, 1.3a-b.
63. Ibid.

simultaneously always changing, *zaohua* is as elusive as it is profound. In terms of human potentiality, unification with the forces of *zaohua* can be thought of as the very highest point of creative consciousness. It is the infusion of the microcosm with the macrocosm, Yin and Yang, earth and Heaven. And as such, we can understand the phenomenon that Zhu Jingxuan described as being "in accordance with the work of *zaohua*" (符造化之功)[64] is exactly the powerful feeling of transcendence that accompanies the ephemeral moment when the self dissolves into creativity.

## Conduits of Creative Energy

When art theorists such as Zhu Jingxuan witnessed the spectacular feats of painters like Zhang Zhihe, Wang Mo, and Li Lingsheng, their instinctive inclination was to relate the actions of these painters to the processes described in the books of Daoism. Although the teachings of Buddhism, which were beginning to flourish at this time, certainly had an impact on the philosophy of painting, perhaps most notably for Zong Bing 宗柄 (375–443)[65] centuries earlier, it still seems that artists turned primarily to Daoism to explain the process by which a painter brings images to life through paint. Many literati of the Tang were well-read in the Daoist texts, and by the middle of the Tang certain alchemical scriptures were gaining popularity in gentry circles. For this reason, when called to put the creative process into written form, art theorists looked to Daoism for the right words. Even in Xie He's first articulation of the famous Six Laws of Painting, he relies prominently on the Daoist notion of the interchanging forces between objects and

64. *TCMHL*.
65. See Susan Bush, "Tsung Ping's Essay on Painting Landscape and the "Landscape Buddhism" of Mount Lu," in Susan and Murck Bush, Christian (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

artists.[66] Thus, since the introduction of painting criticism in China, the language of Daoism has to a large extent shaped its articulation; and in the Tang period, when the religion reached new levels of influence, its ideas penetrated further into aesthetic culture through a series of changes in the classification of painters.

The artistic process of Zhang Zhihe and his contributions to Daoist cosmology in the *Xuanzhenzi* enhanced art theorists' repertoire of concepts; in the case of Zhu Jingxu-an, it seems to have allowed him to understand the artistic process of the *yipin* painters. In terms of the *Xuanzhenzi*, these artists could tap into the boundless potential power of shaping-and- transforming (*zaohua* 造化) by their virtue of being connected to the Real (*zhen* 真). The images they painted emerged miraculously out of thin air, being "so without any source" (*wuzi er ran* 無自而然). If the potency of shaping-and-transforming is a potential wavelength within every artist, the *yipin* painters were thought to be most tuned in to its frequency.

But the *yipin* painters were not the only ones to whom was attributed the power to connect with the creative potential of the Dao—so also were the most excellent painters of the Tang period. In the next chapter, the discussion shifts from the *yipin* painters to the most exemplary, and we discover that many of the same Daoist terms and concepts are used to describe their talents. The subtle connection established by Daoism between the untrammeled and the exalted painters suggests a movement toward the conflation of the

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66. Sarah Fraser, *Performing the Visual: The Practice of Buddhist Wall Painting in China and Central Asia, 618–960*, 207.. In a recent study by Victor Mair, he shows that the Six Laws of Painting very likely have their roots in Indian aesthetic theory; nonetheless, Xie He articulates the Six Laws in China in terms of Daoism. For a detailed study of the links between the Six Laws and Indian painting, see Victor Mair, “Xie He’s “Six Laws” of Painting and Their Indian Parallels,” in *Chinese Aesthetics*, ed. Zong-qi Cai (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2004).

two groups had already begun by the ninth century. The appearance of Daoist elements in Tang painting theory resulted from the prominence of the religion at the time, and two of its scriptures in particular seem to have had the most impact on traditional Chinese art criticism and its notions of creativity: the *Zhuangzi* and the *Yinfu jing*. The next chapter covers the growth of the religion in the Tang, the subsequent spread of these two scriptures, and how they helped shape literary depictions of the exemplary painter.

# Chapter 2. Beyond the Untrammeled Class: Daoism and Mastery in Accounts of Tang Painting

At once what engenders eloquence and escapes articulation, the source of human creativity—the muse, as the Greeks call her—inspires from behind a veil of obscurity. Though they indeed considered it abstract and mysterious, Tang and Song authors on aesthetic theory still did not shy away from writing about creativity and its causes; in fact, around the ninth century, it became a central preoccupation for authors of painting theory and criticism. As they surveyed the works of painters good, bad, and mediocre, Tang writers questioned what accounted for their individual merits and maladies. What, they asked, did the deft painter have that the others did not? By what means was he able to render such beautiful images with a simple writing brush? How did he, first of all, form them with such clarity in his mind, and, at the same time, portray them so skillfully through the pictorial medium? These were the central curiosities of Tang and Northern Song art theorists.

To answer these questions, they turned to the religious and philosophical ideas of conception and invention encoded within the language of Daoism. While arguably an inherent part of the genre of traditional Chinese painting theory since its origins, never before had authors so explicitly made reference to the Daoist textual tradition.[67] In particular, two scriptures and their commentaries feature most prominently in Tang and Song texts: the Warring States philosophical classic the *Zhuangzi*, and the *Yinfu jing*, a later

67. In the sixth century art theorist Xie He's 謝赫 first articulation of the famous Six Laws of Painting, he relies prominently on the Daoist notion of the interchanging forces between objects and artists. See Sarah Fraser, *Performing the Visual: The Practice of Buddhist Wall Painting in China and Central Asia, 618–960*, 207.

philosophical scripture that probably dates to the late Six Dynasties or early Tang and is often quoted with reference to the Daoist practice of interior alchemy.[68] The historical gap in the production of these two texts demands that we ask different questions of each of them, and, at the same time, examine the relationship between the two. As for the *Zhuangzi*, which had reached a more-or-less fixed and codified format in the fourth century, its unprecedented appearance in several ninth-century painting texts requires investigation. Why, some five hundred years later, did Chinese writers become interested in linking the *Zhuangzi* to theories of artistic production? What changes in Tang intellectual culture led to this new application of a very ancient Daoist text? The second of the two, the *Yinfu jing*, was fairly new on the literary scene, and was quickly capturing the attention of both Daoist clergy and Confucian literati of the Tang period.[69] How did its ideas shape Tang-Song concepts of creativity? In what ways did the scripture and its commentaries relate ideologically to the developing aesthetic interpretations of the *Zhuangzi*? Finally, how did art theorists blend concepts from the two texts together to form a consistent model for understanding the creative process of superior artists?

In the pages to follow, I answer these questions as part of a larger argument, namely, that other art theorists writing in the Tang period described the most exemplary painters using many of the same Daoist terms and concepts we saw Zhu Jingxuan employ with regard to the *yipin* painters in the first chapter. The specialized vocabulary in both

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68. Scholars have different opinions on the *Yinfu jing*'s date of origin. Tradition dates it variously from the Warring States period (475–221 BCE), or in the Jin or Northern Wei (386–534). However, its dating can only be confirmed to the early Tang period (618–907). See Florian C. Reiter, in *DZTK*, s.v. "The *Yinfu jing* and Its Commentaries."
69. Ibid.

cases derives from a combination of principles based on the aforementioned texts. To clarify matters here at the outset, I suggest that conceptualization of creativity in the Tang rested upon two interrelated notions: 1) the most highly skilled artists passively channel the shaping-and-transforming forces of the Dao to produce their art and their technical abilities were therefore not the main point of praise, and 2) they achieved this mediumistic state by transcending all discursive thoughts and becoming completely absorbed in the moment of creativity. That art theorists employed similar concepts to articulate the artistic processes of the untrammeled and exemplary painter alike suggests that, centuries prior to the elevation of the *yipin* classification in the eleventh century, there were already subtle links between the *yipin* painters and virtuosity in painting. The rising prominence of a new Daoist-inspired understanding of superior and untrammeled artists corresponds with the rapid developments in the Daoist religion which occurred during the Tang, most notably the wide circulation of the two scriptures mentioned above. Ultimately, in the tenth century, certain art theorists located in Sichuan province, which had served as a major hub of Daoist activity for centuries, promoted the untrammeled class of painters to the top of the traditional ranking system, thereby completing the conflation between conceptions of the exemplary and the untrammeled artist. The subsequent effect of this shift was circular, resulting in a fuller integration of the Daoist model into the painting theory of the Northern Song.

## Setting the Scene: Daoism in the Tang

To understand how and why Daoism became central to painting theory in the Tang, it is most helpful to begin with the centrality of the religion to Tang society as a whole. Just

two centuries prior to the formation of the dynasty, the various strands of Daoist philosophy and religion had been codified into a new intellectual system called the Teaching of the Way (Daojiao), which placed it in a category similar to the Teaching of the Buddha (Fojiao) and the Teaching of the Confucian scholars (Rujiao).[70] It became an official doctrine when the southerner Lu Xiujing 陸修靜 (406–477) assembled the first Daoist canon in the fifth century, bringing together the liturgies and scriptures from the three major schools of Daoist practice.[71] These were (in order of development): the Way of the Celestial Masters (Tianshi dao), the earliest institution of liturgical Daoism founded by the Zhang lineage of Daoist high priests in the third century; the Way of Highest Purity (Shangqing dao), a visualization-intensive school based on revelations from Mount Mao in the fourth century; and the Way of the Numinous Treasure (Lingbao 靈寶), a cosmopolitan synthesis of the earlier Daoist schools that incorporated major elements of Buddhist ritual and doctrine. While the sect with the most social and political power varied according to time and place, all three schools of Daoism began to reach unprecedented levels of membership and influence during the Tang period.

The success of Daoism in the pluralistic religious culture of the Tang dynasty and its relative dominance over the flourishing Buddhist religion resulted in part from the official patronage of the imperial family. When rebellion broke out against the Sui in 613, rumors began to circulate that a millenarian empire would emerge under the leadership of a descendent of Laozi, the legendary sage and author of the *Daode jing*, who had been

70. Mark Edward Lewis, *China's Cosmopolitan Empire: The Tang Dynasty* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2009), 207.
71. Mugitani Kunio, *Encyclopedia of Taoism*, ed. Fabrizio Pregadio (UK, Routledge: 2008), s.v. "Sun Youyue."

worshipped as a god ever since the Eastern Han. Bearing the same surname as the popular Daoist god (whose personal name prior to being apotheosized had been Li Er 李聃, a man named Li Yuan 李淵 (586–635) capitalized on the circulating prophecy to garner support for his military campaign.[72] Meanwhile, the honored Shangqing Daoist master Wang Yuanzhi 王遠知 (528–635), disappointed that the Sui emperor had ignored his advice to move the capital to Jiangdu on the Yangzi, decided to secretly transmit Daoist registers to the future Tang founder, Li Yuan. This ritual transmission of spiritual power added confidence to the efforts of Li Yuan and his sons, and, in turn, assured Wang Yuanzhi of Daoist support under the new dynasty. After several years of biding his time in the Taihang Mountains, Li Yuan ultimately invaded the Sui capital, Daxingcheng, and, in 618, he accepted the emperor's abdication and declared a new dynasty.[73]

Daoists such as Wang Yuanzhi were no doubt pleased when the early emperors carried out their promise to promote the Daoist religion. In 620, Emperor Gaozu officially pronounced Laozi to be the "sage ancestor" of the Tang imperial house. Five years later, the second emperor Taizong declared Daoism to be the highest religion of the realm. Its growth became exponential in 666 when Emperor Gaozong gave Laozi a more dignified title and constructed state-sponsored temples dedicated to his worship in more than three hundred prefectures throughout the empire. Within the same decade, Gaozong began to place Daoist clergy under state auspices and in 675 he issued the first imperial decree to

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72. For in-depth studies on Daoist messianism and the foundation of the Tang dynasty, see: Stephen Bokenkamp, “Time After Time: Taoist Apocalyptic History and the Founding of the T’Ang Dynasty,” *Asia Major* Third Series 7 (1994): 59–88. and Anna Seidel, “The Image of the Perfect Ruler in Early Taoist Messianism,” *History of Religions* 9 (1969): 216–47.
73. Mark Edward Lewis, *China’s Cosmopolitan Empire: The Tang Dynasty*, 31.

compile a new Daoist canon. Interest in Daoism then spread among Confucian scholars when Gaozong made the *Daode jing* a required text for the imperial examination in 678.[74]

The rule of Emperor Xuanzong (r. 712–756) aligned the state more closely with the Daoist religion than any previous time in history. Records depict Xuanzong as an emperor with an intense Daoist fervor, a man who made it his personal mission to transform Tang China into an entirely Daoist nation. He had paired statues of himself and Laozi raised in all state-sponsored Daoist temples, sponsored the dissemination of a new edition of the Daoist canon, and ordered clergy to perform rituals at regular intervals for the benefit of the empire. But more than simply being an avid patron of the religion, the emperor received lay ordination by the eminent Daoist and celebrated calligrapher Sima Chengzhen 司馬承禎 (646–735). During his reign, Xuanzong also changed the traditional rituals to the Five Sacred Peaks into specifically Daoist ceremonies, and he ultimately placed all Daoists under the Court of the Imperial Clan, thus making them official kin.[75] His rule ended when he, like many of his successors, died from mercury poisoning, possibly from cinnabar, one of the primary ingredients in the pills for immortality. This intense imperial interest in the Daoist pursuit of immortality through alchemical means helped to establish the dynasty's reputation as the "Golden Age of Alchemy."[76]

The succession of several short-lived emperors who experimented with immortality elixirs corresponds with the production of the dynasty's most important literary works on painting.[77] Following the deaths of several less significant emperors of the later Tang

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74. Mark Edward Lewis, *China's Cosmopolitan Empire: The Tang Dynasty*, 208.
75. Mark Edward Lewis, *China's Cosmopolitan Empire: The Tang Dynasty*, 209.
76. Fabrizio Pregadio, in *EOT* (2), s.v. "Waidan."
77. These were the *TCMHL* and the *LDMHJ*.

came the more well-known Wuzong (r. 840–846), an avid supporter of Daoism. As testimony to his Daoist fervor, while on the throne Wuzong dedicated exorbitant amounts of labor on constructing a landing strip for flying immortals.[78] Not only was he highly committed to the religion, but he attempted to see to it that his people were as well. From 843–845, Wuzong enforced an empire-wide persecution of Buddhism, motivated largely by its rivalry with Daoism.[79] With the support and active involvement of the imperial clan, Daoism continued to spread, both tangibly, in terms of membership, but also intellectually, as a source of ideas for understanding experience. Thus, the substantial presence of Daoist thought in ninth century intellectual culture paved the way for new Daoist terms and concepts to enter contemporary discourse on painting theory.

Bearing in mind the great extent to which Daoism permeated the intellectual culture and the religious activities of the imperial family during the Tang dynasty, we can begin to see the cultural landscape which allowed for a blending of Daoism and aesthetic theory. But besides the invention of the *yipin* class, how exactly did Daoist thought manifest itself in the art world? And to which sources did art theorists turn for their ideas on Daoist conceptions of creativity? Beginning with the second of these questions and then moving into the first, the next section provides an overview of the two texts which seem to have served as intellectual guidebooks for Tang dynasty art theorists interested in creativity.

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78. T.H. Barrett, in *EOT* (2), s.v. "Zhao Guizhen."
79. Sarah Fraser, *Performing the Visual: The Practice of Buddhist Wall Painting in China and Central Asia, 618–960*, 208.

## The *Zhuangzi*, the *Yinfu jing*, and a New Aesthetic Theory

Among all philosophical and religious texts which circulated during the ninth century, the two which likely played the greatest role in shaping aesthetic theory were the *Zhuangzi* and the *Yinfu jing*. Both texts inspired large commentary traditions in the Tang dynasty, receiving attention from Daoist clergy and Confucian literati alike.[80] The *Zhuangzi*, also known as the *Nanhua zhenjing* 南華真經, or the *True Scripture of Southern Florescence*, has its roots as early as the Warring States period (475–221 BCE), but not until the fourth century did it become the text that would have been read in the Tang dynasty. While it is traditionally attributed to Zhuang Zhou 莊周, a Daoist thinker of the fourth century BCE, more recent scholarship has confirmed the involvement of several authors in a gradual, pluralistic process of compilation.[81] Its basic ideology derives from the early Daoist philosophical tradition established by the *Daode jing*, but there are certain distinctions that set the *Zhuangzi* apart from its predecessor. Rather than maintain the poetic style of the former scripture, the *Zhuangzi* takes on an anecdotal format, wherein a variety of historical and fantastical characters interact to deliver the text's philosophical messages. Moreover, in contrast with the *Daode jing*, the *Zhuangzi* is not particularly concerned with society and instead focuses entirely on the individual mind.[82]

Of its central themes, several became especially pertinent to art theorists of the Tang and to an even greater degree in the Song. Foremost of these was its emphasis on

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80. Florian C. Reiter, in *DZTK*, s.v. "The *Yinfu jing* and Its Commentaries."
81. David McCraw, *Stratifying Zhuangzi: Rhyme and Other Quantitative Evidence* (Taipei, Taiwan: Institute of Lingustics, Academia Sinica, 2010), 51.
82. Livia Kohn, in *EOT* (2), s.v. "Zhuangzi."

personal freedom, which is most apparent in the invention of the *yipin* class discussed in the previous chapter. Not restrained by conventional modes of painting, Zhang Zhihe and the first *yipin* painters followed their own inspiration to determine when and how to create their art. The second theme that caught the interest of art theorists was the attainment of mastery achieved through the development of a close personal relationship with the Dao. Within its thirty-three chapters, there are several vignettes of master artisans who, by virtue of their intuitive sense of the Dao and its natural rhythms, have excelled to a level of effortless mastery over their respective crafts. Allusions to these anecdotes first appear in the ninth century painting literature and ultimately come to permeate the texts of Northern Song aesthetic theory.

The appearance of the artisan vignettes and other references to the Zhuangzi in Tang aesthetic theory can be accounted for not only by the prominence of Daoism, but also by developments related to the scripture itself. Two highly important commentaries to the Zhuangzi appeared between the fourth and seventh centuries and shaped how Tang audiences understood the text. The first of these, Guo Xiang's 郭象 (circa 252–312) interpretation and edition, had a greater impact, both within Daoist circles and on Chinese culture as a whole.[83] Due to the success of his edition, the way Guo abridged and rearranged its chapters became the standard to the present day. In his interpretation, Guo Xiang wrote extensively on shaping-and-transforming (zaohua 造化) as the obscure process by which beings "spontaneously obtain (zide 自得)" their true natures. For this reason, his was no doubt a popular interpretation among aesthetes writing on art in the

83. Ibid.

ninth century. Following Guo Xiang's influential commentary, the famous Daoist scholar Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 (fl. 631–52) wrote a sub-commentary based on a new Daoist philosophical trend of the early Tang known as Chongxuan, or Twofold Mystery.[84] Near the same time, Cheng's younger brother Li Rong 李榮 (fl. 658–63), a Daoist monk who was in frequent contact with high-class literati, also wrote a commentary on the Zhuangzi which is now lost.[85] The purposes of their two commentaries were many, foremost among which was to further the fusion of Daoist philosophy with its continuously developing religious practices. As the religion grew in the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries, the Zhuangzi and its commentaries subsequently reached wider circulation, and it ultimately became one of the central texts of Tang intellectual culture.

Concurrently with the *Zhuangzi*, another Daoist text known as the *Yinfu jing* 陰符經, or the *Scripture of the Hidden Accordance*, seems to have drawn the attention of the great painting theorists of the Tang. There is some debate among modern scholars as to its date of production, but it seems to have first appeared in the seventh century, around the same time Daoist scholars were writing new commentaries on the *Zhuangzi*.[86] Since the scripture itself comprises just over three hundred words, extensive commentaries built up around it, often quite disparate in their interpretations. Even the title, for instance, is interpreted in various ways, but it is generally understood as a "tacit agreement" between the Way of Heaven and the Way of Humankind.[87] The mainstream commentarial tradition

84. See Chapter 2 of Shiyi Yu, *Reading the Chuang-Tzu in the T'ang Dynasty: The Commentary of Ch'eng Hsüan-Ying (Fl. 631–652)*, vol. 39 (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2000).
85. Isabelle Robinet, in *EOT* (1), s.v. "Chongxuan."
86. Isabelle Robinet, in *EOT* (2), s.v. "Yinfu jing."
87. Ibid.

therefore explicates the connection between the shaping-and-transforming (*zaohua* 造化) powers of Heaven and those inherent in human beings, and suggests that by cultivating the Way, the adept will be better able to channel the creative forces of Heaven. It advocates an underlying harmony between nature and humanity and served as one of several theoretical bases for the developing practice of interior alchemy (*neidan* 內丹).

Even prior to the development of its substantial commentary tradition, the original scripture itself contains several passages which, I believe, would have excited intellectuals interested in understanding human creativity. The following excerpt serves as an example of the text's focus on the fundamental integration between humans and the universe:

> The universe lies within one's hand—
> and the ten thousand transformations arise from one's very body.
> Human beings are the very nature of Heaven;
> their heart-minds the motive force of the Dao.[88]
>
> 宇宙在乎手, 萬化生乎身. 天性, 人也. 人心, 機也.

Building on the Celestial Masters' principle that a microcosm of the universe is present within the palm of the high priest (Fig. 2),[89] the *Yinfu jing* asserts there exists a unity

88. *DZ* 31: *Huangdi yinfu jing*, 1.1a.
89. Image taken from a Daoist secret liturgical manual and reprinted in John Lagerwey, *Taoist Ritual in Chinese Society and History* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), 17.

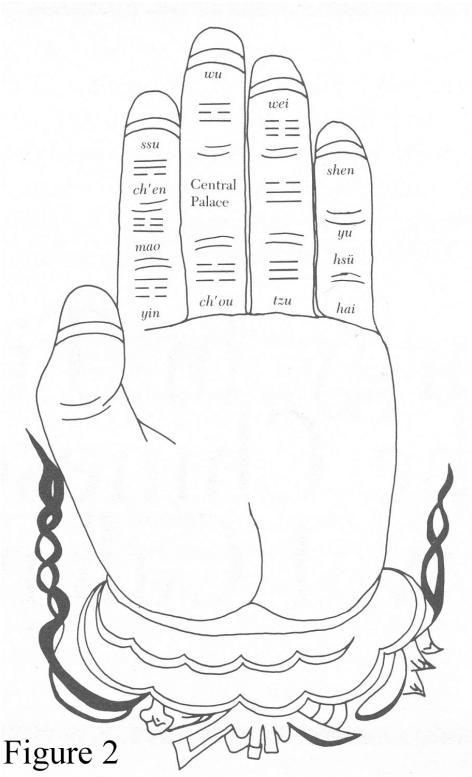

Figure 2

between the human heart-mind and the creative powers of the Dao. From the perspective of the ninth century aesthete already familiar with the *Zhuangzi* commentaries and their elaborations of shaping-and-transforming, the *Yinfu jing* helps to answer the question of how an artist creates a painting. In discussing either the aberrant techniques of the untrammeled artists of the first chapter or the spectacular processes of other laudable painters, the notion that the human heart-mind embodies the same creative forces that brought the universe into being served as a revelatory explanation.

The *Yinfu jing* received a wide and diverse audience from the late Tang to the Song.[90] Between the seventh and fourteenth centuries, the *Yinfu jing* inspired no less than twenty commentaries extant in the *Daozang*, far more than most scriptures which circulated during this time. According to the dates of surviving commentaries included in the *Daozang*, the most activity surrounding the scripture occurred during the Northern Song, when commentary production was at its peak. As one indication of its prominence, the Song catalogue Tongzhi, "Yiwen lüe," lists thirty-nine titles.[91] Thus, it seems that once interest in the text began in the middle-late Tang period, a trend of commentarial development continued to snowball into the next dynasty, only finally receding at the beginning

90. Florian C. Reiter, in *DZTK*, s.v. "The *Yinfu jing* and Its Commentaries."
91. Ibid.

of the Yuan (1279–1368). As it gained influence in the eighth and ninth centuries, the *Yinfu jing*, together with the *Zhuangzi*, and the respective commentary traditions for each text, combined to form the ideological basis for a new understanding of creativity rooted squarely in the Daoist textual tradition.

There can be little doubt that the scripture played a central role in shaping popular theoretical understanding of creativity from the Tang to the end of the Song. Beyond the potential explanatory power of the scripture and the ubiquity of its commentaries in intellectual circles, the appearance of its central concept, *tianji* 天機, in several of the most prominent painting texts from the ninth to the eleventh centuries further suggests the scripture served as a theoretical guidebook for art theorists.[92] The term *tianji* 天機 is cognate to the word *shenji* 神機 (and also simply *ji* 機), literally a "celestial or divine mechanism," but better understood as what Isabelle Robinet describes as the "dynamic aspect of the Dao, the motive force of the world that never ceases to function and originates in the dynamic tension between the opposites—Yin and Yang, contraction and dissolution, movement and quiescence (*dong* and *jing*)."[93] The concept of the motive force of the Dao first appears in the *Zhuangzi* and becomes a central focus of the *Yinfu jing*—so central, in fact, that one Northern Song edition in the *Daozang* is listed as *Tianji jing* 天機經, the *Scripture of the Motive Force of the Dao*.[94] Given the sudden appearance of the term *tianji* 天機 in aesthetic theory at the precise time the scripture began to inspire

92. In the Tang dynasty, the term *tianji* 天機 appears twice in the *Lidai minghua ji* and its cognate *shenji* 神機 appears in an essay by the scholar-official Fu Zai. In the Northern Song, the term *tianji* appears in the *Yizhou minghua lu* and the *Tuhua jianwen zhi.*
93. Isabelle Robinet, *Encyclopedia of Taoism*, ed. Fabrizio Pregadio (UK, Routledge: 2008), s.v. "Ji."
94. *DZ* 1190. See also Jan A. M. De Meyer, in *DZTK,* s.v. "Tianji jing," but note that Meyer translates *Yinfu jing* as "*The Scripture of Hidden Opportunities*," which suggests he may have misunderstood the content of the text.

a substantial commentary tradition in the ninth century, not to mention the parallels between its conceptual framework and new writings on creativity, it seems highly likely that the *Yinfu jing* and its commentaries served as the primary theoretical foundations for Tang and Northern Song art theorists.

Beginning in the ninth century, the terms and concepts of these two Daoist texts—the *Zhuangzi* and the *Yinfu jing*—become the basis for articulating the artistic processes of the exemplary artist. The *yipin* painters described in the first chapter, though technically placed "outside the rank of painters," receive the utmost praise from author Zhu Jingxuan, comparable to the complimentary words he uses to discuss the most reputed painters of the Tang, such as Wu Daozi, for example. Just as he describes the *yipin* painter Wang Mo as "moving as swiftly as shaping-and-transforming," Zhu Jingxuan also tells us that Wu Daozi's "heart-mind returned to shaping-and-transforming" (*xin gui zaohua* 心歸造化).[95] The concept of shaping-and-transforming, or *zaohua* 造化, is one which originated in the *Zhuangzi* and became central to the *Yinfu jing*, as well as to the *Xuanzhen zi*, the text attributed to the first *yipin* painter Zhang Zhihe. By shifting the discussion from the periphery and taking a closer look at Tang painting literature, we can more tangibly grasp the prominence of Daoist elements in descriptions of the period's most exalted artists, and how the distinction between untrammeled and exemplary painters was already beginning to blur in the ninth century.

95. *TCMHL.*

## Understanding Creativity in Daoist Terms

The popularity of Daoism in the Tang dynasty not only prompted the identification of a new untrammeled class of painters, but it also shaped the way art critics understood the creative processes of master artists. At a time when Daoist temples spread throughout the empire, when statues of Tang emperors stood side by side with those of Laozi, and when the *Zhuangzi* and the *Yinfu jing* circulated among the educated elite, the entrance of new Daoist ideas into painting theory was indeed a natural consequence. One of the earliest pieces of evidence we have that a new model of creativity based on contemporary trends in Daoist intellectual culture had emerged is an account written by scholar-official Fu Zai 符載 (d. 813). In this concise but powerful description of the painter Zhang Zao 張璪 (mid to late eighth century), Fu Zai details his impressions of the painter's performance in explicitly Daoist terms:

> Right in the middle of the room, Zhang Zao sat down on the floor with his legs spread out, drummed up his vital breath, and the divine motive force [of the Dao] began to issue forth. Those in attendance were shocked; it was as if bolts of lightning were flashing across the sky, or a fierce whirlwind were sweeping up into the heavens. Violently turning, twistingly pulling, he whirled [his hands] quickly [with] flashing speed. He made his brush fly and the ink spray, then clapped his hands with a cracking sound, and [from the] flickering maelstrom, strange shapes were suddenly born. When he finished, there were pines, bumpy and coarse; rocks, precipitous and craggy; waters deep; and clouds, distant and delicate. He threw down his brush, stood up, and looked around. [It was] as if a storm had just passed, and [he could] perceive the natural disposition of all things.
>
> When we observe Master Zhang's art, it is not painting, it is the True Dao. As he paints, he knows to abandon attention to adroitness, his thoughts darkly and mysteriously transform, and the things [he paints] lie within his heart-mind.

員外居中, 箕坐鼓氣, 神機始發. 其駭人也,若流電激空,驚飆庚天. 摧挫斡掣, 撝霍瞥列. 毫飛墨噴, 捽掌如裂, 離合惝恍, 忽生怪狀. 及其終也, 則松鱗皴, 石巉巖, 水湛湛, 雲窈眇. 投筆而起, 為之四顧, 若電雨之澄霽, 見萬物之情性.
觀夫張公之藝非畫也, 真道也. 當其有事, 已知遺去機巧, 意冥玄化, 而物在靈府.[96]

Several details of this account deserve explication. At the very outset, Fu Zai evokes the imaginary iconography of a literary character whom I refer to as the Real Painter (*zhen huazhe* 真畫者), a legendary painter-sage first introduced in *Zhuangzi*, Chapter 21.

While references to this figure become quite common in Northern Song painting literature, at this time in the Tang dynasty this seems to have been a new innovation on the part of Fu Zai. The allusion comes through his choice of characters in the opening line: "Zhang Zao sat down on the floor with his legs spread out and drummed up his vital breath (*jizuo guqi* 箕坐鼓氣)." This unusual manner of sitting, *jizuo* 箕坐, also known as "sitting like a winnowing basket," had long been associated both with irreverence in the presence of superiors and with spiritual gymnastic practices, and was the term *Zhuangzi* commentators used to explain the text's episode of the Real Painter.[97] The story of this legendary painter, the earliest known account of a painter in the history of Chinese literature, tells of an eccentric artist whose refusal to conform earns him the respect of powerful aristocrat, and, at the same time, a job:

96. Fu Zai 符載, "Preface on Observing Secretary Zhang Painting Pines and Rocks, Guan Zhang Yuanwai Hua Songshi Xu 觀張員外畫松石序," in *ZGHLLB*, 20. Thanks to Professor Kate Lingley for her help with this translation.
97. Donald Harper, "A Chinese Demonography of the Third Century B.C," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 45 (1985), 489–90. One of the earliest appearances of this term to relate the Real Painter episode appears in Guo Xiang's commentary. See DZ 745: *Nanhua zhenjing zhushu*, 23.20b–21a.

> When the first Lord of Song prepared to have pictures painted, a multitude of scribes arrived together. They received his commands respectfully and stood in attendance... There was one scribe who arrived later, casually and without hurry. He received the commands but did not stand in attendance; instead, he left the room. The noble ordered someone to go see what he was doing. Behold, he had loosened his robes and was sitting with his legs outspread, half naked. The lord then said: "He will do. He is the Real Painter."
> 宋元君將畫圖, 眾史皆至, 受揖而立... 有一史後至者, 儃儃然不趨, 受揖不立, 因之舍. 公使人視之, 則解衣般礴贏. 君曰：「可矣, 是真畫者也」.[98]

The moral of the story may seem puzzling at first. What has his unusual behavior to do with genuine ability in painting? What did it mean for readers of the early Han dynasty, and had that meaning remained consistent for the Tang and Song authors who referenced the anecdote?

The particular behaviors exhibited by the painter in the story communicate his role as a Daoist sage, not only a *zhen huazhe* 真畫者 ("real painter"), but a *zhenren* 真人 ("Real Man"), the exemplar of the *Zhuangzi* and the transformational goal toward which all later Daoists would aspire. In a later chapter, the main character of the text, Master Zhuang himself, enters the palace gates in the same irreverent manner as the Real Painter: "Master Zhuang entered the palace gates without hurry, saw the king and did not kowtow to him (莊子入殿門不趨, 見王不拜)."[99] Not only do the two anecdotes share a common theme of social behavior contrary to conventional expectations, but the vocabulary and grammar the text employs to describe the leisurely entrance of the main character are

98. DZ 670: *Nanhua zhenjing*, 4.18b. Translated adapted from Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih, *Early Chinese Texts on Painting* (Harvard University Press, 1985), 42.
99. DZ 670: *Nanhua zhenjing*, 5.26b.

identical. This behavior signifies the indifference of the Daoist sage of the *Zhuangzi* toward hierarchical social roles; in each case, rather than attempting to show deference to his superiors through ritual displays of submission, the Daoist character rather humorously seems unaware of such social expectations. Since the Real Painter behaves in the same unusual manner as the quintessential Daoist sage of the text itself, we can be certain that the author intended to link the two through the symbolism of their identical irreverent behavior.

But beyond his casual arrival to the lord's summons, it is the manner in which the Real Painter sits that cements his place in history as the archetypal "painter-sage." His loosened robes and relaxed posture are the gestures which communicate his character as a person beyond convention and conformity; they were, in other words, the marks of a true artist. As Donald Harper has shown, the act of "sitting like a winnowing basket" was a proscribed behavior according to the ancient *Book of Rites* because it had close associations with magico-religious practices, such as exorcism.[100] It seems that audiences in both Han and Tang times would have understood this gesture as simultaneously irreverent (unwilling to conform to social customs) and supernatural, as if the sitter were preparing to enter a trance. As for the symbolism of loosening his clothing, Sarah Fraser has pointed out that the theme of the sage with loosened garb holding accoutrements of

100.Donald Harper, “A Chinese Demonography of the Third Century B.C,” 489–90.

relaxation would become a significant iconographical component of tomb pictorial design only a few centuries later (Fig. 3).[101]

Figure 3: Image of Xi Kang 嵇康, one of the legendary Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove. This is a rubbing from the Nan Zhao Period tomb (sixth century) in Nanjing, first excavated in 1960.

Returning now to Fu Zai's account of the painter Zhang Zao, the significance of his word choice in the opening line becomes clear. By the ninth century, this vision of the Daoist sage had already transformed from a literary trope to an active part of Tang visual culture. By beginning his passage with the word *jizuo*, Fu Zai evokes for his audience the powerful painter-sage of the *Zhuangzi* and suggests that painter Zhang Zao is of the same supernatural caliber. To the word *jizuo* Fu Zai adds *guqi* 鼓氣, "to drum up his vital breath," further elucidating the religious nature of Zhang Zao's preparation to paint. The verb-object expression *guqi*, which appears numerous times in the *Daozang*, figuratively describes breathing exercises intended to raise one's level of concentration and focus the mind on oneness.[102] Thus, the account suggests that the reputed painter Zhang Zao, prior

101. Sarah Fraser, *Performing the Visual: The Practice of Buddhist Wall Painting in China and Central Asia, 618–960*, 213–14. For a thorough study of the iconography of the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove, see Audrey Spiro, *Contemplating the Ancients: Aesthetic and Social Issues in Early Chinese Portraiture* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford: University of California Press, 1990).
102. The frequent appearance of this term in the *Daozang* can be confirmed through a search on Academia Sinica's *Scripta Sinica* textual database.

to picking up the brush to paint, first entered a trance-like state using bodily postures and methods derived directly from the Daoist tradition.

In the very next phrase, Fu Zai continues to rely on Daoist ideas to explain Zhang Zao's incredible artistic talent. After a few moments of sitting on the floor in the winnowing basket position and performing breathing exercises, the "divine motive force of the Dao begins to issue forth (神機始發)." As mentioned above, the term *shenji* 神機 is cognate to the word *tianji* 天機, the "motive force of the Dao" which first appears in the *Zhuangzi* and becomes a central focus of the *Yinfu jing*.[103] While some scholars have translated *shenji* as the "inspiration" of Zhang Zao, the term in fact has a precise definition in the Daoist textual tradition and should be understood in its original context.[104] The *shenji*, the "divine motive force of the Dao," is not the inspiration of the painter but an objective, external reality which *generates* his inspiration. The term, like its cognate *tianji* 天機, appears in the earliest surviving version of the *Yinfu jing*.[105] One later commentary on the scripture clarifies the term as it elucidates the scripture's central premise, mentioned above:

> The Yellow Emperor has said that human beings are the very nature of Heaven; their heart-minds the motive force of the Dao. [But] what does this mean? The immortal Guangchengzi has explained:
>
> The movement of the dipper is the motive force of Heaven, [just as] the heart-mind is the motive force of human beings. The heart-mind itself is

103. The term *tianji* 天機 appears in three chapters of the *Zhuangzi*: "Qiushui 秋水," "Dazong shi 大宗師," and "Tianyun 天運."
104. In her translation of *shenji* 神機, Susan Bush reads the term as "the inspiration" of the painter. See Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih, *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, 85.
105. DZ 31: *Huangdi yinfu jing*, 2a.

divine; [thus] when their divine motive force (*shenji*) harmonizes with the Dao, it is beyond the ken of gods and demons. Before human beings are born, they first receive a binding as their destiny, then their parents come together, and thereupon the life becomes a form. The embryo first gives rise to spirit, therefore we say this is the source of the person's nature. [When] human beings are able to calm their heart-minds, like Heaven and Earth they can move the motive force of the Dao; they are therefore the same as Heaven and Earth. Only if one's disposition is still, the motive force of his heart-mind harmonizes with the Dao. Thus, it is said that "human beings are the very nature of Heaven; their heart-minds the motive force of the Dao."[106]

黃帝日: 天性, 人也; 人心,機也. 何也? 廣成子曰:
天以斗運為機, 人以心為機. 心者,神也. 神機合道,乃鬼神不測. 人未生之時,先受一系為命,然後父母二為相合,故乃成形. 胎元生神,故為性之源. 人能澄心, 如天地動機,故同天地. 乃因性靜,心機合道. 故曰: 天性,人也. 人心,機也.

The *Yinfu jing* proposes an inherent unity between the human mind and the Dao, and in this interpretation, we learn that quietude is a necessary requirement to actualize their harmony. Once calm, the human mind reaches a state more receptive to become one with the Dao, and therefore gains the ability to take potential images and shape them into forms.

Bearing this in mind as we return once again to Fu Zai's description above, we observe that the artistic performance of Zhang Zao resembles a meditative trance, a passive act whereby the painter allows the natural forces of the Dao to transfer through him and on to the pictorial surface. We now imagine him there on the floor, legs spread apart, holding his brush, breathing deeply and rhythmically, presumably with eyes closed. Once his vital breath had been sufficiently stimulated, and his mind adequately stilled, a

106.*DZ* 119: *Yinfu jing sanhuang yujue*, 1.7b–8a.

portal opens—the motive force of the Dao—from which emerge powerful elements of rain, lightning, and strong winds. He moves about violently—twisting and pulling and waving his arms—much like a spirit medium in possession; with ink spraying and brush flying, images of nature miraculously appear on the surface before him. These images emerge from a "flickering maelstrom" (*lihe changhuang* 離合惝恍), similar to Daoist cosmogonical accounts of order being born out of primordial chaos. The usage of *lihe* 離合 in this passage to describe a flickering motion is often used to articulate the radiance of gods, such as the nymph of the Luo River, whose "divine radiance flickered—now Yin, now Yang" (神光離合, 乍陽乍陰).[107] After Zhang Zao completed his painting, Fu Zai contemplated the nature of such a performance. This was no art, he concluded, "this was the True Dao," the primordial beginning of all things, bringing coherent forms into being through the body of Zhang Zao.

The excerpt concludes with additional references to Daoist terms. Once Fu Zai asserts the performance of Zhang Zao to be a pure manifestation of the Dao, he provides details to clarify this abstract explanation. Firstly, he continues, painter Zhang leaves all skill behind him: painting at this level was a matter not of technical ability but of intuition; it required an ability to connect with powers greater than oneself. Rather than concern himself with the proper bends and twists of his writing brush, Zhang's thoughts, says Fu Zai, undergo a process of mysterious transformations (*yi ming xuanhua* 意冥玄化). The expression *xuanhua* 玄化 also appears frequently in the *Daozang*, generally denoting the dynamic processes by which latent potential comes to fruition, the

107.D.C. Lau, Chen Fong Ching, Ho Che Wah, eds., *A Concordance to the Works of Cao Zhi* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2001), 11.

mechanisms behind the creation of the universe. With his awareness fixed in the realm of mysterious transformations, Zhang Zao finds images to paint residing within his *lingfu* 靈府, literally "numinous prefecture," another Daoist term that originates in the *Zhuangzi* and is said to be the "residence of spirit or consciousness" (*jingshen zhi zhai* 精神之宅).[108] What Fu Zai asserts here is that Zhang Zao, by virtue of his connection with the Dao and its motive force (*shenji* 神機), could access images of nature in the upper reaches of his consciousness. Like a spirit writer who channels illegible talismanic characters without conscious awareness, painter Zhang receives applause not for his technical skill, but for his ability to pacify his thoughts and act as a conduit for creative forces to act through him.

If we examine this account from a critical distance and understand it to be, at least in part, hagiographical and hyperbolic, we are better able to reconstruct Fu Zai's perception of the artist's creative process. The vision he provides tells of a two-step artistic process: preparation followed by spontaneous action. First, the painter prepares himself to enter a creative state by assuming a posture associated for nearly a millennium with the literary trope of the Daoist "painter-sage" and also with exorcistic and self-cultivation practices.[109] He then begins to shift his ordinary consciousness into one more conducive to creativity through the use of his breath, a method also practiced by some of the most well-known painters of the period and often enhanced through the use of alcohol (discussed in detail on the section on Wu Daozi, below).[110] In Fu Zai's eyes, this prepara-

108. *DZ* 745: *Nanhua zhenjing zhushu*, 6.32a.
109. Donald Harper, "A Chinese Demonography of the Third Century B.C," 489–90.
110. See, for example, the discussion of Wu Daozi, below.

tory procedure puts the painter in harmony with the creative forces within himself, and because "the human heart-mind is the motive force of the Dao (人心, 機也)," the properly attuned painter did not form the images he painted on his own accord, he *accessed* them. Once he had achieved his creative state, the entranced painter abruptly bursts into spontaneous action; in this step of the process, observers such as Fu Zai report that powerful forces of nature course through the painter's body and take control of his writing brush. In this view, artistic genius necessitated spiritual cultivation, built up through religious practice, and the critical ability to surrender to the creative process. This Daoist paradigm, embodied by Fu Zai's account, reoccurs in the writings of his contemporaries, especially in their descriptions of the most highly-respected painters.

One such author is the poet and statesman Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846), whose description of the contemporary painter Zhang Dunjian provides a parallel view of an artist's creative process. Both he and Fu Zai were poets and thus artists in their own right; however, neither man was a painter himself. Their writings nonetheless provide a glimpse into the literati perspective on painting for the period, and they represent the kind of literature contemporary painters would have read. Bai Juyi's critique of painter Zhang Dunjian 張敦簡 (early ninth century), while lacking the exciting flair of Fu Zai's account, shares many of the same themes and vocabulary borrowed from the Daoist tradition:

> Young Zhang Dunjian achieved the harmony of Heaven and the art of the heart-mind, which accumulated to become action and emerged as art. His painting is the ultimate art! There is no fixed [formula of] technique in painting, resemblance is its technique, just as there is no constant model in learning, truth is the model. In sketching an idea or forming a thing, usually it has been turned over in the heart-mind together with spiritual insight (*shenhui* 神會)...

> Afterwards one realized that learning that is in the bones and marrow is achieved by mental skill, and technique matching shaping-and-transforming (*zaohua* 造化) comes from natural harmony. Zhang merely received from his heart-mind and transmitted to his hand, and it was so without his being conscious of its being so.[111]
>
> 張氏子得天之和, 心之術, 積為行, 發為藝, 藝尤者其畫歟! 畫無常工, 以似為工; 學無常師, 以真為師. 故其措一意, 狀一物, 往往運思, 中與神會...
>
> 然後知學在骨髓者, 自心術得; 工侔造化者, 由天和來. 張但得於心, 傳於手,亦不自知其然而然也.

From the very first details of his critique, Bai Juyi reveals that his understanding of creativity, like Fu Zai's, derives in part from the language of the *Yinfu jing*. Although his use of terminology makes the connection less apparent than with the account by Fu Zai, the concepts behind Bai Juyi's convictions seem to derive from the same source. Like Fu Zai, Bai Juyi advocates the *Yinfu jing*'s central message of a unity between human beings and Heaven, and he suggests the painter's knack signified an especially potent "harmonization with Heaven" (*tian zhihe* 天之和).

Also parallel with Fu Zai's description of Zhang Zao is the emphasis on intuited images over technical prowess with the writing brush. Bai Juyi asserts that painting is no simple skill to be learned; it adheres only to verisimilitude, just as learning adheres only to truth. Beyond this basic principle, to paint meant not to think, not to strive with effort, but to feel, to *intuit*—to allow the images to surface. In Bai's view, when a painter achieved this, it was a type of spiritual insight, *shenhui* 神會, another term with roots in the contemporary Daoist textual tradition. Quite similar to what Fu Zai described as

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111. Bai Juyi 白居易, "Record of Painting, Huaji 畫記," in *Zhongguo Hualun Leibian* 中國畫論類編 *(Categorical Compilation of Chinese Painting Theory) (Beijing: Zhongguo Gudian Yishu Chuban She, 1956), 25.* Translation adapted from Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih, *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, 71.

images residing within the heart-mind, Bai Juyi understands the masterful quality of Zhang Dunyi's art as a product of intuition. Under this paradigm, the images the master painter brings forth derive from a higher quality of thought; not ordinary consciousness, but the part of the mind most in touch with the Dao and its capacity for shaping-and-transforming (*zaohua* 造化).

In the final details of this excerpt, Bai Juyi's critique resembles Fu Zai's mediumistic interpretation of Zhang Zao's performance. Referencing influential concepts from the *Zhuangzi*, Bai writes that "Zhang merely received from his heart-mind and transmitted to his hand, and it was so without his being conscious of its being so." The unity he identifies between the images the painter's hand describes and the images he receives in his mind reflects the especially well-known story from *Zhuangzi*, Chapter 13 ("The Way of Heaven, Tian Dao 天道"), of a legendary artisan named Wheelwright Pian. In the original text, the old wheelwright challenges a nobleman's proclivity for book learning, arguing that the classical texts are merely the dregs of ancient sages, and, to defend his position, he offers up his finesse at carving wheels as a metaphor for true knowledge. When shaping a wheel, he explains, "it manifests through my hand and in response to my heart-mind; it is ineffable, [but] there is a certain knack to it" (得之於手而應於心, 口不能言, 有數存焉於其間).[112] To the wheelwright, the sage of the story, the highest form of knowledge could not be taught or even spoken, but only felt; true mastery, in other words, was a matter of intuition.

112. DZ 670: *Nanhua zhenjing*, 3.16b–17a.

Bai Juyi and later writers interested in painting responded to the mind-to-hand concept first articulated in the wheelwright anecdote, and to it they added Heaven as a first step. In the full sequence, images transfer from Heaven to the painter's mind, specifically to his intuitive faculties (*shenhui* 神會) or his spiritual center (*lingfu* 靈府), then to his hand, and then finally appear on the pictorial surface. Aptitude in painting thus involved the absence of analytical thoughts that might impede the movement of images from Heaven to the picture. For this reason, we often read that the exemplary painters produced their masterpieces without conscious awareness. In the language of Bai Juyi, who, once again, recalls the conceptual vocabulary of the *Zhuangzi*, the painting "was so without their being conscious of it being so."

Following the work of Fu Zai and Bai Juyi, the great ninth century art historian and theorist Zhang Yanyuan 張顏遠 (ca.815–after 875) solidified and enhanced the relationship between painting theory and the Daoist textual tradition. From Shanxi province, he was the best-known Tang writer on art and the editor of the *Record of Celebrated Painters of Successive Dynasties*, *Lidai minghua ji* 歷代名畫記, which is dated to 847. Zhang Yanyuan came from an eminent family of high officials and learned calligraphy and painting by studying the collection of his grandfather. He was promoted to Auxiliary Secretary in the Ministry of Sacrifices in 847 and became a Minister in the Grand Court of Appeals in 874. In addition to the *Lidai minghua ji*, Zhang Yanyuan also

compiled the *Essential Records of Calligraphy Exemplars, Fashu yaolu* 法書要錄, a compendium of writings on calligraphy from the Later Han through the Tang.[113]

For Zhang Yanyuan and many of his contemporaries, the greatest painter of the Tang dynasty was Wu Daozi 吳道子 (c.689–c.758), whose reputation as a "sage of painting (*huasheng* 畫聖)" derived in part from his unmediated technique with the brush.[114] In many ways, descriptions of Wu Daozi match those of the *yipin* painters described above. People who witnessed him paint maintained that he could make perfect curves and straight lines without the use of the typical drawing tools required by most painters. Also honored also for his swiftness, legend holds that he once painted over three hundred *li* of the landscape along the Jialing River in only a single day—from memory. By comparison, the same task required his contemporary, the famous landscapist Li Sixun 李思訓 (651–716), several months to complete, who, as he painted, had to consult sketches of the landscape he had done previously.[115] Wu's ability to retain such a vast area of scenery and represent it with incredible speed suggested to onlookers that his paintings, like those of the untrammeled artists, were miraculous works, achievable only by the most divinely inspired artists. Furthermore, like the descriptions of the *yipin* painters above who were known for using alcohol in preparation to produce their art, it was reported that each time Wu Daozi painted, he had to first become intoxicated. What seems to have kept Wu Daozi in the divine class (*shenpin* 神品, the highest class of

113. Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih, *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, 294. Thanks to Professor Poul Andersen for providing the approximate dates for Wu Daozi. See Poul Andersen, "The Painter-Sage, Wu Daozi, and the Practice of Religious Painting in China" (Paper presented at the Univeristy of Wisconsin, 2008).
114. *LDMHJ.*
115. Ibid.

painters in Tang times) and out of the untrammeled class of the *Tangchao minghua lu* was that his technique (i.e. use of the writing brush only) remained in accordance with traditional methods.

Besides rapidity and a penchant for alcohol, another connection between Wu Daozi and the *yipin* painters was an appreciation for Daoism and the practice of its meditational breathing techniques. In one famous anecdote of the painter retold by several authors, Wu Daozi becomes so impressed with the sword dance of a Daoist priest that he is spontaneously moved to paint.[116] As for the religious practice of Wu Daozi in preparation to paint, Zhang Yanyuan provides some details for us and simultaneously reveals his own familiarity with the *Zhuangzi*:

> Someone once asked me, saying: "How was it possible that Master Wu could bend his bows, brandish his blades, plant his pillars, and place his beams without making use of line-brush or ruler?
>
> I answered him and said: "He retained his spirit and concentrated on oneness. He harmonized with the work of shaping-and-transforming, and it was free to borrow Master Wu's brush. This has been expressed before in the words 'if a thought is kept in mind before the brush, when the painting is finished the thought will be present in the painting.' But is it not thus with all things when they reach the height of excellence, for why should it be true of painting alone? So also Cook Ding's wielding of his knife, and Carpenter Ying's wielding of the axe...
>
> Now if one makes use of the line-brush and ruler, this is dead painting. But if he retains the spirit and concentrates on oneness, this is real painting."
>
> 或問余曰:「吳生何以不用界筆直尺而能彎孤挺刃, 植柱構梁？」

116. In his study of this vignette, Poul Andersen has suggested it reveals a relationship of inspiration between Daoist ritual and the practice of religious painting, the genre for which Wu Daozi was best known. That the details of the story increase in Northern Song texts over their Tang counterparts may be an indication that this inspirational relationship between priest and painter became more prevalent between the ninth and eleventh centuries. See Poul Andersen, "The Painter-Sage, Wu Daozi, and the Practice of Religious Painting in China."

> 對曰:「守其神, 專其一. 合造化之功, 假吳生之筆. 向所謂「意存筆先畫盡意在也」. 凡事之臻妙者, 皆如是乎, 豈止畫也？與乎庖丁發刀, 郢匠運斤...
>
> 夫用界筆直尺又是死畫也. 守其神, 專其一, 是真畫也.」[117]

Similar in complexity to the account written by Fu Zai, there are several details in this passage worthy of unpacking.

First Zhang Yanyuan employs a similar mediumistic model in discussing the painting practice of Wu Daozi. To account for Wu's adroitness with the brush, Zhang asserts that he first "retained his spirit and concentrated on oneness." This parallels Fu Zai's account of the preparatory process of Zhang Zao detailed by Fu Zai above, who sat "like a winnowing basket and drummed up his vital breath." Though Zhang Yanyuan is less narrative in his description, he nonetheless suggests that Wu Daozi first looked inward to still his mind and focus on unity with the Dao. The expression "to retain the spirit" (*shou qi shen* 守其神) appears in a later commentary to the *Yinfu jing* in a set of instructions to attain the Dao: "Rid all desires, still the heart-mind, stabilize the intent, retain the spirit, embrace the one, attain stillness, and then introduce the new and replace the old—only then can one reach the Dao."[118] With his mind still, the power of shaping-and-transforming could "borrow Master Wu's brush," an even more explicit statement of the mediumistic mode of painting seen in the earlier examples above. In all three cases

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117. Yanyuan 張顏遠 Zhang, *Lidai Minghua Ji* 歷代名畫記 *(the Record of Celebrated Painters From Successive Dynasties)* (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Meishu Chuban She, 1963), 35–36.. Translation based on William Reynolds Beal Acker, *Some T'ang and Pre-T'ang Texts on Chinese Painting*, vol. 1 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1954), 180–82.

118. *DZ* 119: *Yinfu jing sanhuang yujue*, 2.3b: 去其慾,靜其心,定其意,守其神,抱一至靜而入新換舊,乃達於道. The expression *ruxin huanjiu* 入新換舊, literally "to introduce the new and replace the old," is a fairly standard way to articulate the Daoist breathing technique known as *tuna* 吐納.

presented in this chapter, the link between the painter and the shaping-and-transforming powers of the Dao parallels the descriptions of the untrammeled painters of the *Tangchao minghua lu*.

In the next detail, Zhang Yanyuan alludes to the artisans of the *Zhuangzi* to explain that painting works according to the same set of principles as virtuosity in any skill. Placed in their original contexts, Cook Ding and Carpenter Ying both embody the notion of effortless skill, of mastery attained through a deep, personal knowledge of the Dao. In *Zhuangzi*, Chapter Three, Ding impresses a nobleman with the finesse and speed with which he slices up an oxen; when asked how his skill could be so excellent, Ding lays down his knife, and divulges the secret to his craft:

> What I care about is the Way, which goes beyond skill. When I first began cutting up oxen, all I could see was the ox itself. After three years I no longer saw the whole ox. And now—now I go at it by spirit and don't look with my eyes. Perception and understanding have come to a stop and spirit moves where it wants.[119]
>
> 始臣之解牛之時，所見無非全牛者。三年之後，未嘗見全牛也。方今之時，臣以神遇而不以目視，官知止而神欲行.

Cook Ding follows in accordance with the natural rhythm of things, without painstaking effort or analytical concern, and for this reason, he says, even after nineteen years in the business, his knife is as good as when it first came from the grindstone. The second of the two artisans, Carpenter Ying, was likewise known for his power and grace in the practice of chiseling. As the story goes, whenever his friend, a plasterer, would find himself with a

119. *DZ* 670: *Nanhua zhenjing*, 1.14b. Translated in Burton Watson, *Zhuangzi: Basic Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 45–46.

bit of plaster on the tip of his nose, the carpenter would swing with a whirlwind of force and cut the speck of plaster clean off.[120]

While the *Zhuangzi* introduces these characters as fantastical and metaphorical examples of "nourishing life (*yangsheng* 養生)."[121] Understood in their original contexts, the artisans of the *Zhuangzi* attained the Dao through their complete presence to the moment as they carried out their respective crafts. Zhang Yanyuan alludes to them to explain excellence in the art of painting, suggesting that virtuosity in any craft—be it painting or butchering—blossoms from the dissolution of "perception and understanding" in the creative act. The *Zhuangzi* artisans represent models of mastery. At this level, one could perform awesome feats effortlessly, without so much as thinking about it. As easily as ordinary people walk, stand up, or sit down, the master butcher slices perfect cuts, the master carpenter carves perfect shapes, and, as Zhang Yanyuan suggests, the deft painter brings forms to life on a two-dimensional surface.

In his conclusion to the section above, Zhang Yanyuan adds one final detail that may be an allusion to the Real Painter vignette of the *Zhuangzi*, mentioned above. The story of the Real Painter ends with the words, "This is the real painter" (是真畫者也), and the conclusion to this section by Zhang Yanyuan reads "This is real painting" (是真畫也).[122] The similarity of these two lines coupled with the fact that Zhang Yanyuan's statement follows a direct allusion to the *Zhuangzi* suggests he purposefully intended to reference the Real Painter. Though difficult to verify, this word choice may have evoked

120.*DZ* 670: *Nanhua zhenjing*, 4.40a–b.
121."Nourishing Life" is the title for the third chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, where Cook Ding appears. See *DZ* 670: *Nanhua zhenjing*, 1.14b.
122.*LDMHJ*.

the Real Painter imagery for the original audience of Zhang's text. In any case, it is clear from this account that Zhang Yanyuan clearly intended to establish a link between the creative process of the exemplary painter and the uncanny skills of the *Zhuangzi* artisans, a trend which he began and one that would appear in nearly all the influential painting literature just two centuries later.

Similar to all three of the first untrammeled painters, Wu Daozi would drink alcohol in order to prepare himself to paint. In the actual biography of Wu Daozi in the *Lidai minghua ji*, Zhang Yanyuan begins by detailing the painter's ritualized preparatory practice:

> [Wu Daozi] liked to drink wine in order to exercise his vital breath. Whenever he was about to pick up his brush, he had to become intoxicated.[123]
> 好酒使氣; 每欲揮毫, 必須酣飲.

For Wu Daozi, the consumption of alcohol was a personal ritual: a state of intoxication had to be achieved before he allowed himself to pick up the brush. His drunken state allowed him to exercise his vital breath, *shiqi* 使氣, another Daoist set of terms that appears in hundreds of places throughout the *Daozang*.[124] Connected with a reputation for drinking in preparation to paint, rapidity and spontaneity in producing his paintings, excellence in his finished works, and a quality of work on par with the work of shaping-and-transforming, Zhang Yanyuan's accounts of the "painter-sage" Wu Daozi parallels Zhu Jingxuan's descriptions of the untrammeled painters.

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123.*LDMHJ*. Thanks to Professor Poul Andersen for his help with this translation.
124.This information is based on a search on Academia Sinica's *Scripta Sinica* online database.

In this chapter, we have explored the Daoist elements in descriptions of three exemplary painters written by three distinct Tang scholar-officials. Through this analysis, at least two points should now be clear. Firstly, these late Tang literati understood the creativity of exemplary artists according to a Daoist framework deriving from contemporary commentaries on the *Zhuangzi* and the *Yinfu jing*. Secondly, and more importantly, their descriptions bear a striking resemblance to those of the untrammeled painters discussed in the first chapter. The continuity between the two categories suggests that the untrammeled class, prior to its official elevation to the top rank, already stood out as exemplary in its own right. As these painting texts continued to circulate, the *Yinfu jing* reached even greater audiences, inspiring nearly five times as many commentaries in the Northern Song. This popularity, in turn, stimulated intellectual interest in the hidden accordance between human beings and the natural world. It was therefore a natural step for art theorists living in the region of Shu (Sichuan), two of whom were Daoists themselves, to officially assert the superiority of the untrammeled painters.

# Chapter 3. Mainstreaming the Aberrant: The Elevation of the Untrammeled Class and the Subsequent Spread of Daoist Elements in Northern Song Painting Theory[125]

Within his earthen jar he always brewed free-and-footloose pleasures,
Under his brush he leisurely took shaping-and-transforming powers.
甕中每醞逍遙樂, 筆下閒偷造化功.[126]

These words, according to the great Northern Song art theorist Guo Ruoxu 郭若虛 (eleventh century), were "often recited" (*changyin* 常吟) in praise of the now-obscure Five Dynasties bird-and-flower painter Hu Zhuo 胡擢 (tenth century). Commenting on the popular saying, Guo Ruoxu went on: "His lofty disposition and untrammeled tastes were [indeed] like this" (其高情逸興如此).[127] From the quotation, which, as Guo Ruoxu affirms, was a common recitation to laud this particular painter, we know that the role of the *Yinfu jing* and its commentaries had come to play an even greater role in the eleventh century than previously. Contemporary commentaries on the scripture show an increasing interest in the idea of "taking" or "stealing" from the work (or power) of shaping-and-transforming. One example from roughly the same period tells us that "to take from the active force of the Dao, this is to take shaping-and-transforming through the bosom, to grasp the universe within the hand."[128] In addition to more frequent and explicit references to the *Yinfu jing* and its commentaries, the literary tropes from the *Zhuangzi*,

125. Thanks to Professor James Frankel for inspiring the title of this chapter via his feedback on one of my presentations in the spring of 2012.
126. *THJWZ.*
127. Ibid.
128. *DZ* 113: *Huangdi yinfu jing jie*, 9b: 盜機者, 是奪造化於胸臆,拈宇宙在掌中. This commentary, written by the court Daoist Jian Changchen 蹇昌辰 uses the verb *duo* 奪 ("to take by force"), a slight variation from *THJWZ's tou* 偷 ("to steal"); nonetheless, the passages from these respective texts convey the same meaning.

particularly the Real Painter and enlightened artisan vignettes, become still more prevalent in Northern Song painting texts. The heightened presence of Daoist elements in the eleventh century demands we question the impetus for this new intellectual trend.

In the present chapter, I argue that the eleventh century elevation of the untrammeled class of painters both resulted from, and contributed to, a growing interest in the aesthetic applications of Daoism. Around the turn of the century, art theorists in the region of Shu elevated the untrammeled class of painters to the top of the traditional ranking system, no doubt in response to the growing prestige of the Daoist aesthetic introduced by Tang scholars such as Fu Zai and Zhang Yanyuan. Once it was officially the new ideal mode of painting, art theorists had increased incentive to explore the implications of Daoism in the theory of painting. Additionally, continued intellectual interest in the *Zhuangzi* and the *Yinfu jing*, as well as periods of intense imperial involvement with the religion, helped to further the valorization of the untrammeled aesthetic. As a result of these developments, Daoist elements in painting theory reached their peak frequency in the texts of the Northern Song (See Chart 1).

Before proceeding into the next dynasty, it is perhaps best first to review what we have discussed thus far. In the opening chapter, I argued that the initial conception of the untrammeled class seems to have been formed largely in response to the unique techniques and eccentric personality of the well-known eighth-century Daoist painter Zhang Zhihe. The other two of the first three untrammeled painters, Wang Mo and Li Lingsheng, though not certifiably adepts of the Daoist religion, are nonetheless characterized as Daoists in their biographies, thus enabling us to conclude that the untrammeled

class, at the time of its invention, had close associations with Daoism. Furthermore, the first untrammeled painters received words of high praise from the art theorist Zhu Jingxuan, the first person to our knowledge to have applied the term to painting. In the second chapter, I argued that boundaries between the untrammeled painters and the exemplary painters were already beginning to blur in the ninth century. Several ninth century art theorists explained the creative processes of eminent painters in Daoist terms parallel to those used by Zhu Jingxuan to describe the untrammeled painters.

If the untrammeled painters were already regarded as favorably as the most reputed ones, conflating the two categories and designating the *yipin* as the first rank simply brought the trend to its logical conclusion. As interest in the Daoist aesthetic model increased, so also did an interest in spontaneous, uninhibited modes of producing art. Because the untrammeled painters and their techniques epitomized this mode of invention, it would not be long before the *yipin* gained official recognition as the superlative class. But such a theoretical change could not occur through ideological evolution alone; it required definite actors to rewrite the traditional classification, and make it official. And it is to these actors, the eleventh-century art theorists of Shu, and their socio-historical context, that the discussion now turns.

## Redefining Excellence: Daoism and the Art Theorists of Shu

In 1006, art theorist Huang Xiufu 黃休復 wrote the *Record of Famous Painters of Yizhou*, thereby marking an important date in the history of painting theory in China. It is this text which survives as the central work to elevate the *yipin* class, which he renamed as the *yige* 逸格 (having more-or-less the same meaning), to the top of the hierarchy of

painters. No longer forced "outside the ranks," the *yige* now enjoyed the utmost status and prestige; it reigned as the superlative, the highest standard to which an artist could strive:

> The classification of painters divides up into four categories: the untrammeled, the divine, the wondrous, and the capable. The [initial] arrangement of these four categories is Zhu Jingyuan's [Zhu Jingxuan's] development of old; however, he placed the *yipin* outside of the classification in order to indicate that these painters were unable to be categorized. In this book, however, I [Huang Xiufu] elevate the *yipin* classification to the very top of the ranking system, in order to clarify that none of the other three categories can come first.[129]
>
> 品以四格, 曰逸, 曰神, 曰妙, 曰能. 其四格之目, 雖因唐朱景元之舊, 而景元置逸品於三品外, 示三品不能伍. 休復此書又躋逸品於三品上, 明三品不能先.

In addition to reordering the classification, Huang Xiufu makes subtle adjustments in the definition of the untrammeled class. No longer concerned with the validity of its potentially unorthodox methods, he instead speaks of the *yige* in more technical terms:

> The paintings of the untrammeled class are the most difficult. This grouping is clumsy in the regulated drawing of squares and circles, and disdains minute thoroughness in colors and patterns. Its brushwork is abbreviated and its forms fully attain spontaneity. None can imitate it, for it issues from the outward expression of intent.[130]
>
> 畫之逸格最難, 其儔拙規矩於方圓, 鄙精研於彩繪, 筆簡形具得之自然, 莫可楷模, 出於意表.

Thus, in redefining the untrammeled class, Huang Xiufu makes positive statements about the actual qualities of these painters, in contrast his predecessor Zhu Jingxuan, who only told us they "were *not* in accordance with the ordinary methods."[131]

This new definition is helpful both because of what it introduces and what it keeps intact from Zhu Jingxuan's text. From Huang's new definition, we learn of the *yipin*

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129. *YZMHL.*
130. *YZMHL,* "Pinmu 品目."
131. *TCMHL.*

painters' minimalistic technique, their lack of concern with the application of color, and their inimitable originality. One common thread that immediately links his definition to the *yipin* painters of the *Tangchao minghua lu* lies in the assertion that "its brushwork is abbreviated and its forms fully attain spontaneity (*ziran* 自然)," which recalls the ninth century *yipin* painter Li Lingsheng, whose images "all emerge out of spontaneity." With its roots in the Warring States classics of Daoist philosophy, the term *ziran*, meaning "spontaneity" or more literally "so-of-itself," serves as yet another link between the untrammeled class and the Daoist tradition.

Huang wrote this preface at the beginning of the eleventh century, at a time when religious Daoism was flourishing in China, not least in the state of Shu, which had long been a center of Daoist activity. In the beginning of the third century, seven hundred years prior to the formation of Song, the earliest sectarian Daoists known as the Celestial Masters (Tianshi dao) established their messianic kingdom in the Shu area.[132] The founding moment of this organization, the appearance of Taishang Laojun (the deified Laozi) to the patriarch Zhang Daoling 張道陵, occurred at Mount Heming in Shu, which is located near the more well-known Mount Qingcheng (lit., "Green Citadel"), also in Shu, where Zhang later went to preach the tradition.[133] The latter mountain became home to the autarchic community founded by the Daoist leader Fan Changsheng 范長生 (d. 318), who later acted as the chancellor and spiritual advisor to the military general Li Xiong 李雄 (270–334), who ruled over a short-lived Daoist dynasty from 303–334. According to Terry Kleeman, "after Li Xiong's death in 334, the Daoist character of the

132. Christine Mollier, in *EOT* (1), s.v. "Messianism and Millenarianism."
133. Vincent Goossaert, in *EOT* (2), s.v. "Qingcheng Shan."

state waned... but Daoist influence remained, as evidenced by an attempt to restore the state, after its demise in 347, under the son of Fan Changsheng."[134] A few centuries thereafter, in the Six Kingdoms or early Tang period, several major temples were constructed which survive to this day: the Jianfu gong 建福宮 (Palace for the Establishment of Blessings) at the foot of the mountain, and, on the mountain itself, the Shangqing gong 上清宮 (Palace of Highest Clarity) and the Changdao guan 常道觀 (Abbey of the Constant Dao), also known as the Tianshi dong 天師洞 (Cave of the Celestial Master).[135]

During Huang Xiufu's lifetime in the eleventh century, temples and monasteries continued to spread across the land in unprecedented numbers, no doubt resulting in part from the literary and political impact of the famous liturgist Du Guangting 杜光庭 (850–933), who resided there during the second half of his life. Prior to emigrating to Shu, Du had earned the position of Drafter of the Compositions at Imperial Command (*wenzhang yinzhi* 文章應制) and performed ritual on behalf of the throne and state. Due to political unrest, Du ultimately departed from the capital and made his home in Shu, where he spent the next twenty eight years traveling throughout the province in search of books and writings. After the Tang commander in Shu, Wang Jian, established his own state of Former Shu in 901, he later appointed Du Guangting to posts as the Grand Master of Remonstrance (*jianyi dafu* 諫議大 夫) an Grand Preceptor of the Heir Apparent (*taizi taishi* 太子太師). Within the same decade, he earned additional positions, including the Grand Academician of a literary institute. He spent the last decades of his life writing and ultimately gained a reputation as "the single most prolific writer and compiler of Taoist

134.Terry Kleeman, in *EOT* (1), s.v. "Dacheng."
135.Vincent Goossaert, in *EOT* (2), s.v. "Qingcheng Shan."

texts before the year 1000."[136] His works—consisting of liturgies for zhai (Retreats); interpretations and commentaries on Daoist scriptures; collections of accounts on miracles and other supernatural phenomena; and works of history, geography, and hagiography—spread across the empire, and it is likely they reached their widest circulation in Shu, their place of origin.[137] Also during Du Guangting's lifetime, the Black Sheep Temple (Heiyang si 黑羊寺) in the city of Chengdu in Shu became the most important temple in all of China. This was the location where Laozi had supposedly met Yin Xi 尹喜 before writing the *Daode jing* and departing for the west. After the discovery of a miraculous brick that bore an inscribed seal prognosticating Laozi as savior of the world, the temple began to receive substantial imperial support. Bearing in mind the long-standing Daoist culture in Shu which was burgeoning in the eleventh century, it seems quite plausible that environmental factors played a role in shaping the Daoist inclinations of Huang Xiufu and his contemporaries and their subsequent interest in untrammeled techniques of painting.

Huang Xiufu's writings further confirm the prevalance of Daoism in eleventh century Shu.[138] His most famous work, the *Yizhou minghua lu*, while best known as the only surviving text which documents the ascension of the *yige* painters, is also important as an art historical record. Along with his related works on aesthetics—*Conversations of Visitors to the Thatched Pavilion, Maoting kehua* 茅亭客話 and the *Record of Celebrated Painters of Chengdu, Chengdu minghua ji* 成都名畫記—Huang asserts that the primary

136.Charles D. Benn, in *EOT* (1), s.v. "Du Guangting."
137.Mark Edward Lewis, *China's Cosmopolitan Empire: The Tang Dynasty*, 210–11.
138.*YZMHL.*

reason for writing the *Yizhou minghua lu* was to document his impressions of the tenth-century murals in Daoist and Buddhist temples, most of which were produced from 758–965.[139] In total, he mentions around 27 religious buildings.[140] What prompted him to compose such extensive records was a sense of urgency. Immediately after Song had conquered the independent state of Shu in 965, the region fell into turmoil; the temples—and their murals—were in imminent danger.[141] He took it upon himself to travel around the region and compose the aforementioned works and preserve the most excellent paintings in words for future generations; in doing so, he organized his records according to the new standard for ranking painters which placed the *yige* class on top. It is important to note that this theoretical shift was not merely the personal choice of Huang Xiufu, but rather a reflection of an emerging understanding of artistic virtuosity which took root in late tenth century Shu.

A brief look at the writings of contemporary Shu art theorists reveals the extent to which this new model of categorization had permeated the culture of the region. Two of the most prominent of these authors were Ren Xian 仁顯 (tenth century) and Goulong Shuang 勾龍爽 (tenth century), and although their original works—the *Guanghua xinji* 廣畫新集 and the *Minghua ji* 名畫記, respectively—have not survived, quotations from these texts in later works give us a sense of their content. From the extant citations of these texts, we can be certain of two critical links between them and the text of Huang Xiufu: 1) all three adopt the same Four Classes (untrammeled, divine, wondrous,

139.Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih, *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, 310.
140.*YZMHL*.
141.*YZMHL*.

competent), and 2) each author places the Tang dynasty artist Sun Wei 孫位 into the untrammeled (*yige*) class. As Shimada has noted, the order in which Ren Xian and Goulong Shuang arranged these classes is not entirely certain; however, since both regard Sun Wei as the most outstanding artist of the Tang, and since there are many other points on which they agree with Huang Xiufu, it is reasonable to conclude that they also gave the the *yige* the highest position among the classes.[142]

The latter of these two theorists, Goulong Shuang, gained a considerable reputation as a famous Daoist; in fact, two sections of the *Daozang* contain a mythological account of his apotheosis into the Old Man Star of the Southern Pole, Nanji xing 南極老人星:

> Gonggong Shi's son, Goulong Shuang, attained the Dao at the age of over 1000 *sui*; he ascended and lived within the Southern Pole, becoming the Star of Longevity.[143]
>
> 共工氏之子勾龍爽得道千有餘歲, 上昇居南極為壽星.

In addition to his status within the Daoist tradition, Goulong Shuang was also a painter of Buddhist and Daoist figures. He earned posthumous recognition from the Imperial Painting Academy under the reign of Shenzong (r. 1048–1085).[144]

Like his contemporary Goulong Shuang, Huang Xiufu was not only closely connected with the Daoist tradition of Shu, but seems to have been a practitioner himself. In the preface to his *Yizhou minghua lu*, which is also the most comprehensive biography of Huang Xiufu that survives, author Li Tan makes one particular reference which suggests Huang had studied Daoist pharmacological arts:

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142. Shūjirō Shimada, "Concerning the I-P'in Style of Painting: Part I," 73.
143. *DZ* 1483: *Tianhuang zhidao taiqing yuce*, 1.312b.
144. *THJWZ.*

> Hailing from Jiangxia, Huang Xiufu—whose style name was Guiben—had undergone a rigorous education, being schooled the Gongyang zhuan 公羊傳 and the Guliang Zhuan 穀梁傳; he selected from the theories of the 100 lineages [of thought]. He sold cinnabar as medicine to earn a living, and he became eminent in the world but remained unaffected. Additionally, he was extremely fond of the art of Gu Kaizhi and Lu Tanwei, and he had a profound understanding of what inspired them. As a personal hobby, he collected the incredible works of the Wei and Jin, and the exemplary pieces of the Sui and Tang, and filled his albums to the brim with these fine silk paintings, which he categorized and treasured.[145]
>
> 江夏黃氏休復, 字歸本, 通《春秋》學, 校左氏, 公, 谷書, 暨摭百家之說, 鬻丹養親, 行達於世, 恬如也. 加以遊心顧, 陸之藝, 深得厥趣. 居常以魏, 晉之奇蹤, 隋, 唐之懿跡, 盈縑溢帙, 類而珍之.

It seems that in addition to being a Confucian scholar and collector of paintings, Huang was trained in the Daoist alchemical arts (*waidan* 外丹), and made his living selling cinnabar pills, which had been the livelihood of many eminent Daoists since at least the Eastern Han period. As an expert of alchemical pharmacology, Huang Xiufu had definite links with Daoism, which, in turn, likely helped to shape his appreciation of the *yige* mode of painting.[146]

His affinity for Daoism can also be confirmed by the consistent application of Daoist ideas in his definition of terms. Adjacent allusions to the *Yinfu jing* concept of *tianji* and the *Zhuangzi* artisan vignettes appear in his respective definitions of the Divine and Wondrous classes of painters:

> Ordinarily in the art of painting, the purpose is to "depict forms in response to things."1 [Yet, when] the motive force of the Dao (*tianji*) whirls aloft, thought harmonizes with the Divine, the creation of meaning

145. Li Tianshu 李畋述, "Preface to the *YZMHL*." Thanks to Professor David McCraw for his help with this translation.
146. Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih, *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, 310.

> and the establishment of form combine wondrously with transformative power... Therefore we designate this the Divine Class.[147]
>
> 大凡畫藝, 應物象形, 其天機迴高, 思與神合, 創意立體, 妙合化權... 故目之曰神格爾.
>
> Painting is done by men, and each man has his own nature. Brushwork may be refined and ink may be subtle without one's knowing how this came about. It is like [Cook Ding's] handling of the blade to cut up oxen, or like [Carpenter Ying's] whirling an axe to clean [plaster] off [his friend's] nose. [Such art is] transferred from the heart-mind to the hand, indirectly exhausting its mysterious subtleties. Therefore, we designate this the Wondrous Class.[148]
>
> 畫之於人, 各有本性, 筆精墨妙, 不知所然, 若投刃於解牛類, 運斤於斫鼻, 自心付手, 曲盡玄微, 故目之曰妙格爾.

These two excerpts reveal an author who not only intended to allude to Daoist concepts, but in fact based his understanding of aesthetics in them. For Huang Xiufu, the revolutionary art theorist of the eleventh century, the painters of the three highest ranks all created according to processes described in the texts of Daoism. He asserts that the images painted by the untrammeled painters were completely "spontaneity," or "so-of-themselves" (*ziran* 自然), the most natural and therefore the loftiest attainable state according to the *Daode jing*, which asserts that "man follows earth, earth follows Heaven, Heaven follows the Dao, and the Dao follows what is so-of-itself."[149] For the next in rank, the Divine Class, Huang Xiufu draws on the language of the *Yinfu jing* and asserts that the key to creativity lies in one's access to the motive force of the Dao (*tianji*); this connection allowed the Divine Class painters to merge their thoughts with divine forces and to paint with "transformative power." Finally, with regard to the Wondrous Class,

147. *YZMHL,* "Pinmu 品目."
148. Ibid.
149. *DZ* 664: *Daode zhenjing*, 1.7a: 人法地, 地法天, 天法道, 道法自然.

Huang Xiufu makes four distinct references to the *Zhuangzi* and explicitly draws parallels between the enlightened skills of its artisan characters and the ability of painters of this class. In the only extant text to elevate the untrammeled painters, its author makes quite clear that the criteria for his painting criticism derive from subtle distinctions within a Daoist aesthetic.[150]

For all three known theorists of Shu, the painter most worthy of acclaim was the late Tang dynasty painter Sun Wei 孫 (late ninth century), the only untrammeled painter of the *Yizhou minghua lu*. According to Huang Xiufu, who studied the painter's works at various sites around Sichuan, Sun Wei shared several characteristics with his Tang dynasty counterparts. These similarities combine with earlier notions of exemplary artists to create the eleventh century understanding of the untrammeled painter:

> Sun Wei was a man of Dongyue...; his *hao* was "The Man of Mount Kuaiji." He had an aloof and unruly disposition, and his aspirations embraced the transcendent. Though he loved to drink wine, he had never once been drunk. Chan monks and Daoist priests frequently consorted with him. When wealthy men requested his work, [he found] their manners to be a bit impolite, [so] even if they offered him much gold, it would be impossible to get him to leave a single stroke. Only those who loved his art could occasionally obtain his paintings...
>
> In both of the temples [of Yingtian Si and Zhaojue Si, where around 886 Sun Wei painted sets of Buddhist and Daoist murals], the Heavenly King, the crowd of retainers, men, and demons, were all diversified. With spears and lances, drums and pipes, they [seemed to] feint and thrust here and there, and an intermingling of tapping and striking was almost audible. Things like falcons and dogs were all completed with three to five strokes; and for objects like bowstrings and axe-handles, he could equally well take up the brush and sketch them as accurately as if following a marking line. [The paintings] had dragons clutching at

150. The four allusions to the *Zhuangzi* in this definition appear in the following order: 1) 不知所然 alludes to the line 今予動吾天機，而不知其所以然 in "Qiushui 秋水"; 2) 若投刃於解牛類 to the story of Cook Ding in "Yangsheng 養生"; 3) 運斤於斫鼻 to the story of Carpenter Ying in "Xu wu gui 徐無鬼"; and 4) 自心付手 to the story of Wheelwright Pian in "Tiandao 天道."

> dashing waters in a variety of shapes and postures. and appearing as if about to fly. In his pines and rocks and ink bamboos, the brushwork was refined and the ink-tones subtle; none could record or transmit the heroic vigor of their bearing. Unless Heaven grants such abilities—elevated feelings and an untrammeled quality—who will be able to equal him in these respects?[151]

> 孫位者, 東越人也... 號“會稽山人”. 性情疏野, 襟抱超然. 雖好飲酒, 未嘗沈酩. 禪僧道士, 常與往還. 豪貴相請, 禮有少慢, 縱贈千金，難留一筆。唯好事者時得其畫焉... 兩寺天王、部眾，人鬼相雜，矛戟鼓吹，縱橫馳突，交加戛擊，欲有聲響。鷹犬之類，皆三五筆而成。弓弦斧柄之屬，並掇筆而描，如從繩而正矣。其有龍拿水洶，千狀萬態，勢欲飛動。松石墨竹，筆精墨妙，雄壯氣象，莫可記述。非天縱其能，情高格逸，其孰能與於此邪？

While this biography reminds us of several traditional *yipin* characteristics, it discards the unconventional methods of the earlier painters, and instead introduces new stylistic elements.

In the opening lines of this biography, we learn that Sun Wei was quite similar to the *yipin* painters of the *Tangchao minghua lu*. Labeled as a mountain man, it seems that Sun Wei was a recluse, much like the painters Zhang Zhihe and Wang Mo. In terms of his personality, Huang Xiufu describes him as an unattached figure, aloof and unruly, parallel in some ways to stereotypes of legendary Daoist immortals. Moreover, although Sun Wei loved to drink, he was never once drunk, similar to Zhang Zhihe who "could drink thirty liters of wine without being drunk."[152] The ability to consume alcohol without feeling the effects of intoxication was a mark of an individual advanced in the Daoist arts of self-cultivation. Moreover, the slightly later *Tuhua jianwen zhi* asserts that Sun Wei "was

151. *YZMHL, juan* 1, p. 1. Thanks to Professor Poul Andersen for his help with this translation.
152. See the discussion in Chapter 1 on pages 14–15.

skilled in Daoist magical arts, [and] well-versed in both calligraphy and painting" (位有道術, 兼工書畫).[153] The author Guo Ruoxu follows this statement with a praiseful description of a mural Sun Wei had done at the Yingtian Temple in Shu, thus implying that his knowledge of Daoist arts accounted for his exceptional talent as a painter. With a prominent Daoist painter as its solitary representative, the eleventh century untrammeled class stays true to its origins and simultaneously reshapes the ideal of artistic excellence.

Contrary to the original untrammeled painters, other details of his biography link Sun Wei more closely with the exemplary painters of the Tang dynasty, most notably Wu Daozi. First of all, each of Zhu Jingxuan's untrammeled painters worked in the genre of landscape; Sun Wei, on the other hand, was primarily a painter of religious subjects, as was his predecessor, Wu Daozi. Furthermore, like Wu Daozi, who was famous for painting without the use of typical drawing tools, Sun Wei could paint bowstrings and axe-handles "as accurately as if he were following a marking line."[154] One new element introduced for Sun Wei was his minimalistic technique. Huang Xiufu asserts he could complete falcons and hounds in only three to five strokes. Taken together, the biography of Sun Wei confirms that earlier components of both the untrammeled artists and the exemplary artists of the Tang have come together to define the eleventh century version of the untrammeled class, which now enjoyed the highest place in the ranking system.

In sum, while other factors may have also influenced the decision of eleventh century Shu art theorists to reorder the traditional classification of painters, the role of Daoism and the widespread interest in applying its ideas to aesthetics seems to have been

153.*THJWZ.*
154.*YZMHL, juan* 1, p. 1.

the primary impetus. Even prior to the turn of the eleventh century, Daoist terms and concepts characterized descriptions of untrammeled and renowned painters alike, subtly bridging the gap between the two categories. We can speculate that this trend of applying Daoism in aesthetic contexts continued between the middle of the ninth and the beginning of the eleventh centuries, particularly in biographies of untrammeled and laudable painters. Thus, when Shu theorists who had personal affiliations with the religion, living in a place with high Daoist fervor, took up the task of writing a new record of painters, they were naturally inclined to restructure the classification in a way which clearly placed a Daoist mode of artistic production on top.

At this point, it would be possible to rest my case that the elevation of the untrammeled class developed in response to the growing interest of art theorists in the Daoist tradition and its application to aesthetics. However, a comparative view of Northern Song painting texts helps us to understand the reverberations of this theoretical shift. If the elevation of the *yipin* did, in fact, develop in response the growing prevalence of a Daoist aesthetic, as I suggest, then it follows that this shift would further stimulate artistic interest in Daoism once the new ranking began to circulate. By taking a closer look at the painting texts of the Northern Song, we find that allusions and direct references to Daoist terms and concepts—particularly those drawn out of the *Zhuangzi* and the *Yinfu jing*—reach a far greater frequency than any previous period in history. Before turning to the texts themselves, it is necessary to briefly review the progressions of the Daoist religion and the heightened activity surrounding the two aforementioned scriptures. These

developments, in conjunction with the official elevation of the untrammeled class, led to further Daoist-inspired trends in Northern Song painting theory.

## Setting the Scene: Imperial Patronage and Scriptural Developments

Despite its reputation in some circles of scholarship as an "Age of Confucian rule," imperial patronage of Daoism and scriptural developments within the tradition continued to increase during the Song dynasty.[155] In recent years, new studies on Song Daoism have explored the growth of the religion and its intricate relationship with the imperial court, as well as with the common people.[156] While classical Confucian education remained an integral part of Song political and moral life, it by no means monopolized the intellectual culture of the period. It was in fact a time of celebrated pluralism, when each of the Three Teachings enjoyed their respective places in society.

In this period, Daoism continued its intimate relationship with the ruling house. Several Song emperors had close affiliations with Daoism, or at least relied on its authority to legitimize their rule. The second emperor, Taizong (r. 976–97), for example, received a prophecy from the divine protector of the Song Dynasty, Yisheng baode zhenjun 翊聖保德真君 (Perfected Lord Assisting Sanctity and Protecting Virtue), that he would become the second ruler of the dynasty. After Taizong ascended the throne, he rewarded the god with the construction of the Shangqing taiping gong 上清太平宮 (Palace of Great Peace of the Highest Clarity, completed in 980), at the site where the

155. See the recent publication by Deiter Kuhn (2009) that goes by this title.
156. For studies of Song Daoism and its relationship to the imperial court, see: Edward L. Davis, *Society and the Supernatural in Song China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2001). and Robert Hymes, *Way and Byway: Taoism, Local Religion, and Models of Divinity in Sung and Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

revelations took place.[157] In 990, Taizong ordered a comprehensive search for Daoist writings, a project that culminated with the production of a new canon in 1016.[158] In addition to collecting Daoist literature, Taizong himself is known to have composed his own version of the popular Lingbao hymn *Buxu ci* 步虛詞 (Lyrics for Pacing the Void).[159]

The successor of Taizong, Emperor Zhenzong (r. 980–1020), was likewise devoted to Daoism. He publicly supported Yisheng baode zhenjun, and was the first emperor to bestow upon the god this official title. Also during his reign, Zhenzong made the Jade Emperor the tutelary god of the Song dynasty, established an alchemical laboratory in the Hanlin Academy, commissioned the construction of hundreds of temples throughout the empire, and regularly gave official ranks to prominent Daoists.[160] The emperor maintained a close relationship with Wang Qinruo 王欽若 (962–1025), a Daoist liturgical master who led state ritual affairs throughout the Zhenzong reign.[161]

Less than one century after Zhenzong, the emperor and aesthete Huizong (r. 1100–1126) would become the most avid supporter of the Daoist religion, and, simultaneously, the most fervid imperial patron of the art of painting in Chinese history thus far. Both a talented painter and calligrapher, Huizong dedicated much time to building the imperial painting collection, which helped to preserve numerous ancient works of art for posterity. In terms of his involvement with Daoism, he wrote commentaries to several scriptures, studied alchemical techniques with the most well-established masters of the

157.Poul Andersen, in *EOT* (2), s.v. "Yisheng baode zhuan."
158.Judith Boltz, in *EOT* (1), s.v. "Da Song Tiangong baozang."
159.Stephen R. Bokenkamp, in *EOT* (1), s.v. "Buxu ci."
160.Isabelle Robinet, *Taoism: Growth of a Religion*, 212.
161.Barend ter Haar, in *EOT* (2), s.v. "Wang Qinruo."

realm, oversaw the first woodblock printing of the Daoist canon, and ultimately began to initiate anti-Buddhist policies later in his reign.[162] In many ways, Emperor Huizong, as a Daoist artist himself, embodied the growing relationship between Daoism and painting that had continuously built momentum throughout the eleventh century.

In the midst of the intense Daoist activity surrounding the palace, the developments most pertinent for our purposes came through the textual tradition. Throughout the Song dynasty, Daoist authors wrote extensive commentaries on the *Zhuangzi* and the *Scripture of the Hidden Accordance*, the two texts proven to be central to painting theory of the Tang dynasty.[163] In fact, the number of the commentaries on each scripture nearly triples what we have recorded for the Tang, indicating a heightened intellectual interest in the ideas expounded by these particular texts.[164] While quite disparate in compositional style—the *Zhuangzi* a series of allegorical tales and the *Yinfu jing* an esoteric treatise on the subtle connections between man, nature, and heaven—both are open to multiple interpretations, and both focus on a theme which would become central to eleventh century intellectual culture: the place of man in the universe.

Studies of the *Zhuangzi* pick up tremendously in the Northern Song, resulting in six to seven additional commentaries extant in the current *Daozang*. The most influential of these seem to have been the *New Exegesis of the Zhuangzi, Nanhua zhenjing xinzhuan* 南華真經新傳 and the *Omissions of the Zhuangzi, Nanhua zhenjing shiyi* 南華真經拾遺, both written by Wang Pang 王雱 (1044–1076). The son of the statesman Wang Anshi 王

162.Christine Mollier, in EOT (1), s.v. "Lin Lingsu."
163.Refer to Chapter 2, pages 25–29.
164.Refer to their respective sections in the *DZTK*.

安石 (1021–1086), Wang Pang sought to interpret the text through the words of Zhuang Zhou himself. Like his predecessor Guo Xiang, Wang emphasizes the attainment of the real and the actualization of the self through spontaneity, both concepts which, as we have seen, were important in painting theory. Another scholar by the name of Chen Jingyuan 陳景元 composed three sets of philological notes to the *Zhuangzi* dating from 1084. Two years after, Jia Shanxiang 賈善湘 produced a phonetic gloss of the text, stating that it was his intention to help readers of the *Zhuangzi* who might not be familiar with some of its more abstruse vocabulary. Finally, a short work survives which explains some of the chapter titles of the *Zhuangzi* and dates from the Song dynasty; however, its exact time of composition is unclear. In any event, that at least six commentaries date to the eleventh century confirms an unprecedented degree of intellectual activity surrounding the scripture.

Even greater in quantity than the commentaries on the *Zhuangzi* dating from the Northern Song were those written for the *Yinfu jing* during this time. Among those which survive, there are nine to eleven whose dates range from the eleventh to twelfth centuries. Compared with their Tang dynasty counterparts, the commentaries written in the Northern Song generally show a greater concern with the human mind, its relationship with the Dao of Heaven, and the moving forces that lead to their "hidden accordance" (*yinfu* 陰符). The popularity of this scripture ultimately spread beyond the Daoist religion and seems to have had an impact on developing trends of Confucian thought, as evidenced by the existence of a later commentary attributed to Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–

1200).[165] Beyond this, the scripture and its commentaries clearly reached the eyes of several prominent art theorists writing in the first half of the dynasty.

Thus, there were two primary historical factors which led to the ubiquity of Daoist elements in Northern Song painting texts. The first was the natural progression of an interest in aesthetic applications of Daoist ideas—a Daoist aesthetic model—that had already proven popular in the Tang. As was discussed above, this trend largely developed in response to the intellectual activity surrounding the *Zhuangzi* and the *Yinfu jing*. Given that commentaries for both scriptures increase in number in the eleventh century, art theorists had greater access to these ideas and could therefore perpetuate the Daoist aesthetic model initiated in the Tang. Adding to this, with the untrammeled class now designated as the most elite, art theorists had more incentive than ever to explore Daoist conceptions of spontaneity and its application to painting.

## Reverberations: Daoist Elements in Northern Song Painting Theory

Song dynasty China was a time of great intellectual pluralism. Centuries prior to the enforcement of the Daoxue (Learning of the Way) orthodoxy in the Yuan dynasty, the Song enjoyed a time of ideological freedom, a time when numerous members of the Confucian elite had lay affiliations with both Buddhism and Daoism,[166] and a time when different systems of thought fit into various places within society, each servings its purpose without any claim to exclusivity. Within this pluralistic worldview, it was the

165. *DZ* 124: *Huangdi yinfu jing zhujie.* See also *DZTK*, 699.
166. See Chapter 1 of Mark Halperin, *Out of the Cloister: Literati Perspectives on Buddhism in Sung Chuna, 960–1279* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2006).

texts of Daoism that had the most bearing on aesthetic theory, particularly during the first half of the dynasty. After the time of Huang Xiufu, several of the most prominent art theorists of the eleventh century make clear that their understanding of artistic creativity lay squarely within a Daoist framework.

Proceeding in chronological order, we begin with a discussion of the writings of Guo Xi 郭熙 (after 1000–ca.1090), one of the dynasty's most renowned painters. From Hunan province, at the height of his career he was appointed to a position in the Imperial Painting Academy under the reign of Shenzong. His collection of writings is called the *Lofty Ambitions of Forests and Streams, Linquan gaozhi* 林泉高致, compiled and edited posthumously by his son, Guo Si, in 1117. A Daoist approach to nature is evident in the writings of Guo Xi, a quality which some scholars suggest may derive from his practice of Daoist breathing techniques in his early life.[167] Around 1085 he painted twelve large screens of landscape subjects for the Daoist Xiansheng Temple, a fact which may indicate a relationship between religious Daoism and landscape painting during the Northern Song period. While it is uncertain what precise meaning his landscape scenes may have had for him, many scholars have suggested they represent a Daoist paradise, a likely suggestion given his documented practice of the religion and the underlying message of Daoist mysticism present in his writings.

In a section entitled "On the Meaning of Painting," Guo Xi evokes the Real Painter vignette of the *Zhuangzi* before discussing his ritualized and religious approach to painting:

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167. See Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih, *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, 142. and Craig Clunas, *Art in China* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 53-57.

> The world only knows that I lower my brush and produce a painting, but they do not know that painting is no easy task. Zhuangzi spoke of the painter who "removed his clothes and sat like a winnowing basket"—this was the true attainment of the painter's method. One must cultivate within the bosom a state of relaxed alertness. As it says [in the *Liji*], "the heart-mind spontaneously becomes calm, upright, loving, and sincere," and then the varying emotions and aspects of men, and the different characteristics of objects, will spontaneously order themselves in the heart-mind and will appear without conscious awareness under one's brush...
>
> If I do not sit peacefully in a quiet place, next to a bright window at a clean desk, a stick of incense burning and the ten thousand worries all subdued, then the perfect poetic verses and their fine meanings cannot be seen, and I will be unable to imagine elusive feelings and beautiful attractions. How can the meaning of painting be easy to attain? The environment must already be ripe, and my heart-mind and my hand must be mutually responsive. Only then can I begin to freely achieve excellence, and on all sides meet with the Source.[168]
>
> 世人止知吾落筆作畫，卻不知畫非易事。莊子説畫史“解衣盤礴”，此真得畫家之法。人須養得胸中寬快，意思悦適，如所謂易直子諒，油然之心生，則人之笑啼情狀，物之尖斜偃側，自然布列於心中，不覺見之於筆下...
>
> 然不因靜居燕坐，明窗凈幾，一炷爐香，萬慮消沉，則佳句好意亦看不出，幽情美趣亦想不成，即畫之主意亦豈易！及乎境界已熟，心手已應，方始縱横中度，左右逢原.

Guo Xi's allusion to the Real Painter suggests that this literary trope gained more nuanced meaning by Song times. In the ninth century texts, authors made only subtle references to the story, but Guo Xi mentions Zhuangzi specifically and makes a direct quotation from the original. The vignette also seems to have accrued significance over time. No longer a

168.*LQGZ.* Translation adapted from Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih, *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, 157–58.

minor detail to be noticed only by those familiar with the literature, Guo Xi now tells us that this story "was the true attainment of the painter's method." Similar to what we deduced from the story by Fu Zai of the painter Zhang Zao, who first stilled his mind in order to receive divine inspiration, Guo Xi asserts that the tale reminds painters of the current age to cultivate a state of relaxed alertness.

The next detail recalls the mediumistic approach to painting that originated with the Tang texts, particularly its articulation by Bai Juyi. Two centuries prior to the time of Guo Xi, Bai wrote: "Zhang merely received from his heart-mind and transmitted to his hand, and it was so without his being conscious of its being so."[169] In the very same vein, Guo Xi maintains that once the state of relaxed alertness has been achieved, things "will spontaneously order themselves in the heart-mind and will appear without conscious awareness under one's brush." What changes, again, is that Guo Xi shows more concern for explaining the creative process in greater detail. In the final detail of this excerpt, Guo Xi provides his own personal practices of self-cultivation that lead him to the optimal creative state. While earlier and contemporary painters may also engaged in similar preparatory procedures, never before have we seen it written out in such a detailed elaboration. Both external and internal environments had to be harmonious before he even picked up his brush to paint. From his description, one imagines him putting his abode in order with the intent to prepare his mind to paint. Once he arranges the proper space, he lights incense, a practice long integrated in Chinese religious practices, which we can assume he does to further his ascent into the creative process.

169.*Zhongguo Hualun Leibian* 中國畫論類編 *(Categorical Compilation of Chinese Painting Theory), 25.*

Next, he meditates to be sure that the "ten thousand worries are all subdued." With the peace of mind he generates, he can readily see images in his mind that correspond to poetic verses, and his mind and hand become mutually responsive (*ying* 應). This concept of response derives from the Daoist idea of sympathetic response (*ganying* 感應), which, from ancient times, described a harmony between human beings and nature. Though the extent to which the elevation of the untrammeled class influenced Guo Xi's writing is not clear, this account at least confirms that the application of Daoist concepts in aesthetic theory was becoming more complex in the eleventh century.

Taking a similar approach with regard to the ritualized preparations of some painters, the poet Chen Shidao 陳師道 (1053–1101), who moved in the milieu of more well-known scholars Su Shi 蘇軾 and Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (below), introduces elements traditionally associated with the untrammeled class to describe the practice of the painter Bao Ding:

> Each time Bao Ding of Xuanzheng painted tigers, he would sweep clean the room and screen off sound by blocking the door and sealing the windows, then he would seek to obtain clarity within this cave-like dwelling. He would drink ten liters of wine, remove his clothes, and sit on the floor, then he would rise to pace and gaze, and spontaneously see a real tiger. Then, he would drink another ten liters of wine, take up his brush and flourish it at once. His conception [of the moment] having been exhausted, he would leave, not waiting for [the painting] to be completed.[170]
>
> 宣城包鼎每畫虎, 埽溉一室, 尸聲, 賽門塗牖, 穴屋取明. 一飲斗酒, 脱衣據地, 臥起行顧, 自視真虎也. 復飲斗酒, 取筆一揮, 意盡而去, 不待成也.

170. *Zhongguo Hualun Leibian* 中國畫論類編 *(Categorical Compilation of Chinese Painting Theory), 1029.*

This episode combines a number of features discussed above and introduces several new themes, revealing the extent to which Daoist elements have become common to aesthetic theory by the late eleventh century. According to Chen's account, the painter cleans in the same manner as Guo Xi, but rather than sit near a bright window, he seals his windows off, creating a cave-like dwelling, reminiscent of the homes of the immortals in Daoist folklore. He then drinks a large quantity of brew, a practice closely bound up in the practice of the untrammeled artists. Next he removes his clothes and sits on the floor, following in the footsteps of the familiar Real Painter of the *Zhuangzi*. After standing up again to pace, he spontaneously envisions a real tiger, calling to mind the visionary practices of Daoist patriarchs throughout the centuries. Finally, he paints the tiger "in a single flourish," only as long as his inspiration lasted, much like one of the first untrammeled painters Li Lingsheng, who would never force himself to continue painting if the work failed to come out as he planned.[171] Thus, the practice of Bao Ding parallels the moment's sport of the untrammeled artists, and adds to it a number of Daoist elements common to painting lore.

Another writer who reveals strong inclinations toward contemporary trends in Daoist thought was Guo Ruoxu (active last half of eleventh century), the grand nephew of Emperor Zhenzong's empress and author of the *Record of Things Seen and Heard about Painting, Tuhua jianwen zhi* 圖畫見聞誌. In place of Guo Xi's focus on the cultivation of a creative state of being, Guo Ruoxu employs Daoist concepts to make sense of

171.For the discussion on Li Lingsheng, refer to pages 15–17 of Chapter 1.

innate artistic talent, which he does in a section of his book entitled "On the Impossibility of Transmitting Spirit Resonance":

> Five [of the Six Laws of Painting] can be studied. [But] as for spirit resonance, [one] must be born knowing [it]. It certainly can not be attained by the meticulous [application of] skill, nor can it be attained through years [of study]...
> Ordinarily a painting must encompass with spirit resonance if it is to be called a treasure of the ages. Otherwise, even if it exhausts the utmost skill, it will be no more than the work of a common artisan. Although it is called a painting, it will not [truly] be a painting. Therefore, Master Yang could not learn from his teacher, and Wheelwright Pian could not transmit [his knowledge] to his son. They connected with and took from the motive force of the Dao (*tianji* 天機), and [their art] proceeded from their heart-minds (*lingfu* 靈府).[172]
>
> 五者可學。如其氣韻，必在生知，固不可以巧密得，復不可以歲月到...
> 凡畫必周氣韻, 方號世珍. 不爾雖竭巧思, 止同眾工之事. 雖曰畫, 而非畫. 故楊氏不能授其師, 輪扁不能傳其子. 繫乎得自天機, 出於靈府也.

By combining several familiar Daoist concepts, Guo Ruoxu makes a direct statement on the origin of spirit resonance, the ultimate desideratum in traditional painting criticism. It could not be studied or transmitted, and only certain individuals were born with its knowledge. These certain few achieve their success in painting by connecting with *tianji* 天機, the motive force of the Dao, the concept which we have seen is central to the *Yinfu jing*. With this link directly established, the painting can emerge from the artist's *lingfu* 靈府, the heart-mind, another Daoist term discussed above in relation to Fu Zai's account of Zhang Zao.

172.*THJWZ.*

As with the statements made by Guo Xi, it is difficult to know whether the elevation of the untrammeled class contributed to Guo Ruoxu's understanding of the inborn quality of spirit resonance. In fact, Guo Ruoxu abandons the traditional classification according to artistic quality and arranges the painters he discusses by their subject matter. But considering the similarity of his conceptualization to one detail provided by Huang Xiufu with regard to the *yipin* class. In defining the *yige*, as he has redefined the category, Huang tells us "none can copy [this kind of painting], it proceeds from the manifestation of [the artist's] intent" (莫可楷模, 出於意表). The close parallel between a work of art that can not be copied and an innate ability that is unable to be transmitted suggests Huang's text also played a role in forming Guo Ruoxu's theoretical ideas.

Moving forward several decades, we find that Daoist references also appear in the imperial catalogue *Xuanhe huapu*, presumably compiled by the scholar-officials at the court of Emperor Huizong (r. 1100–1126). The introduction to the text opens with a reference to the artisan vignettes of the *Zhuangzi*:

> Painting also is an art, and when it advances to the wondrous, then one no longer knows whether the art is the Dao—or the Dao is the art. Like Carpenter Qing's carving of the bell stand, or Wheelwright Pian's shaping of a wheel—the ancients too [were able to] draw from [this level of skill].[173]
>
> 畫亦藝也, 進乎妙, 則不知藝之爲道, 道之爲藝. 此梓慶之削鐻, 輪扁之斲輪, 昔人亦有所取焉.

173.*XHHP,* 1.1.

Much like Wheelwright Pian, whom we have discussed in an earlier section, Carpenter Qing had an intuitive knack in his unique craft of carving bell stands. As the story goes, the carpenter created a bell stand so outstanding that it appeared to be the work of spirits. When asked how he achieved such an accomplishment, the carpenter explains that first he fasts for several days, until his mind becomes completely focused on the task ahead of him. He then enters the forest and waits for an appropriate piece of timber to appear to him; once obtained, the carpenter simply "applies his hand" and the bell stand completes itself.

The appearance of this reference to the *Zhuangzi* at the very outset of the imperial painting catalogue speaks to how central these anecdotes have become to painting theory by the end of the eleventh century. Their placement at the beginning of the text confirms the relative importance of the Daoist concepts they represent, and even suggests that these Daoist elements had become a convention of painting theory by this point in the Song. Perhaps not directly related to the *Yizhou minghua lu* and the elevation of the untrammeled class, the concepts of absorption into the moment of creative action and spontaneous expression which these characters represent are nonetheless in accordance with the fundamental principles of the untrammeled approach toward painting. A look at the writings of contemporary literati further demonstrates the prevalence of the *Zhuangzi* painter and artisan tropes in eleventh century aesthetic theory.

Several of the most influential literati of the Northern Song also articulate artistic ideas through a Daoist interpretive lens. The scholar-official and lay Buddhist Huang

Tingjian (1045–1105) adds further nuances to the *Zhuangzi* artisan analogies in a colophon he wrote on ink bamboo:

> Now, as for coming to enlightenment at the appropriate moment, so that brush and ink will achieve the same results as shaping-and-transforming, how could it be sought elsewhere? Cook Ding's cutting up of oxen and Carpenter Qing's carving of a bell-stand went with their having clarity in themselves and a concentration of vitality like divinities, so closely united that nothing could come between; only then could they achieve excellence.
>
> 夫依約而覺, 至於筆墨而與造化者同功, 豈求之他哉? 蓋庖丁之解牛, 梓慶之削鐻, 與清明在躬, 志氣如神者, 同一樞紐, 不容一物於其中, 然後能妙.[174]

Although Huang Tingjian worked as a Confucian scholar-official and personally aligned himself with the Buddhist faith, this passage indicates that his understanding of artistic excellence derived directly from the *Zhuangzi*. He asserts that the common ground between the practice of a master painter with the craftsmanship of the *Zhuangzi* artisans lies in the ability to concentrate so completely on the subject that the artist and his art become one.

Another Confucian scholar and high-ranking official active toward the end of the Northern Song, Dong You, also drew on Daoist concepts to describe the artistic process and its appreciation by an understanding critic. This is evident in his discussion of the painters Fan Kuan and Li Cheng, both of whom lived just a century prior:

> [Fan Kuan] was an ardent lover of landscape. Concentrating his spirit and releasing his will, he captured it within his heart-mind, then had to

174. Huang Tingjian, *Shangu tiba* 山谷題跋, in *Fenxinge congshu* 紛欣閣叢書, comp. Zhou Xinru 周心如, privately printed by the Zhou family, 1827. Reprinted in Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), text 86. Translated in Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih, *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, 212.

> manifest it externally. *He would loosen his garments* and become expansive, encountering mountains, forests, streams, and rocks.[175]
>
> 山水之嗜者.神凝智解, 得於心者. 必發與外則解衣磅礴正與山水泉石相遇.

> [With regard to Li Cheng's paintings], it is the case that what has been transformed by the art of the heart-mind comes forth when it is time, making use of painting to lodge what is released. Then the transmutations of cloud and mist, wind and rain, and thunder and lightning follow in turn. Right at that time, he forgets his four-limbed physical form and then raises the motive force of the Dao (*tianji*), and what he sees is all mountains. Thus, he is able to completely exhaust the Dao, and when people of later generations encounter his paintings and ask about them, they do not realize the act of painting had been forgotten. They say that there are traces of his brushwork that can be imitated and attempt to find them in his compositions. These people are without even "one hill and one valley" in their breast.[176]
>
> 蓋心術之變化有時出則託於畫以寄其放. 故雲烟風雨雷霆變怪隨以至. 方其時忽忘四支形體則舉天機而見者皆山也. 故能盡其道, 後世接圖求之, 不知其畫忘也. 謂其筆墨有蹊轍可隨, 其位置求之. 彼其胸中無一丘一壑.

As is quite clear from these accounts, strong resonances of Daoism permeate the writings of this eleventh century literatus. Writing about two great landscape masters of the early Northern Song dynasty, Dong You ascribes to them the mystical power to transcend the individual mind and perceive the natural world from another plane. He likens Fan Kuan to the Real Painter of the *Zhuangzi*, using a four-character construction nearly identical to the original text, and uses this comparison to launch the painter into an imaginary flight through mountains and streams. With Li Cheng, he uses even more explicitly Daoist terminology, first evoking Carpenter Qing of the *Zhuangzi* who transcends his physical

175.*GCHB*.
176.*GCHB*.

body in preparation to carve a bell-stand. Dong You elaborates that once he had attained this transcendantal state, Li Cheng could raise the motive force of the Dao, from where he envisions the mountains he paints. In both cases, Dong You describes the creative process of these great masters as a visionary journey to scenic realms, and to conclude he asserts that their excellence was inimitable, for the artistic insight on this level must be attained through one's own breast.

The final literatus to be discussed in this section, Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101), was also the most influential. A prolific writer, poet, and painter of the eleventh century, his impact on eleventh century intellectual culture exceeds even the most eminent of the aforementioned authors and painters. In his political affairs, he became engaged in a rivalry with the Cheng brothers, the leading advocates of the Lixue movement, a new trend in Confucian thought which would ultimately lead to the foundation of Daoxue by Zhu Xi in the twelfth century. While the scholars who moved around the Cheng brothers sought to develop an exclusivist philosophical system and a reinterpretation of the term *dao* as the way of Confucian learning, Su Shi preferred to maintain a pluralistic stance in his intellectual life. He took up an interest in Chan meditation, Daoist alchemical studies, and devoted much time to studying the *Zhuangzi*.[177]

With such a pluralistic worldview, Su Shi had a multitude of sources to turn to for his ideas about art, yet his writings reveal that his understanding of the creative process, like that of so many of his contemporaries, finds its source in the texts of Daoism. In one

177. As an indication of the magnitude of Su Shi's study of the *Zhuangzi*, consider the recent book-length publication on this topic. See Shengdiao 姜聲調 Jiang, *Su Shi De Zhuangzi Xue* 蘇軾的莊子學 *(Su Shi's Study of the Zhuangzi)*, vol. 16, Rulin Xuancui (Taipei: Wenjin Chuban She, 1999).

of his well-known pieces written in praise of his friend Wen Tong, Su includes several allusions to the *Zhuangzi*:

> When Wen Tong painted bamboo,
> He saw bamboo and not himself.
> Not simply unconscious of himself,
> Trance-like, he left his body behind.
> His body was transformed into bamboo,
> Creating inexhaustible freshness.
> Zhuang Zhou is no longer in this world,
> So who can understand such concentration?[178]
>
> 與可畫竹時, 見竹不見人.
> 豈獨不見人, 嗒然遺其身.
> 其身與竹化, 無窮出清新.
> 莊周世無有, 誰知此凝神.

The direct mention of Zhuang Zhou makes quite clear that Su Shi sees the exemplary artistry of his companion Wen Tong in terms of the dissolution of the individual self through the act of creative concentration, one of the central themes of the *Zhuangzi*. Beyond the use of the name Zhuang Zhou, at least two other points allude more subtly to the text. First is the expression *zhuhua* 竹化, transformation into bamboo, which recalls *wuhua* 物化, the transformation of things, a phrase that appears ten times in six chapters in *Zhuangzi* and accounts for one of its most influential ideas. The second is *ningshen* 凝神, concentrated awareness, a concept that appears three times in the text, most famously in the tale of the hunchback who teaches Confucius the skill of catching cicadas.[179]

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178. Su Shi, *Collected Poems*, volume 11, 28b. Reprinted in Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), text 66.
179. *DZ* 670： *Nanhua zhenjing*, 2b–3a. Thanks to Professor David McCraw for pointing out the less obvious allusions in this poem.

While clearly a Daoist in his understanding of creativity and artistic excellence, Su Shi was also an avid patron of Confucian learning, and it is he who coined the term that would come to change the course of Chinese painting for the rest of history: *wenren hua* 文人畫, or literati painting.[180] By the late eleventh century, Su became the center of a group of scholars who took an active interest in painting, and it was under his sponsorship that it became one of the gentleman's arts like poetry and calligraphy. In social settings, he and his friends would paint with ink on paper a variety of subjects of moral significance, such as old trees, rocks, or bamboos. Out of this milieu emerged a new ethos of literati painting, maintaining that the quality of a man's mind could be understood through the close observation of his paintings. Though these ideas would not flourish in the art world until later dynasties, it was Su Shi who set the wheels in motion.

In his writings that pertain to the early formulations of literati painting theory, Su Shi reveals its basis in standard eleventh century painting theory, with clear links to untrammeled techniques and allusions to the *Zhuangzi*:

> When my empty bowels receive wine, angular strokes come forth,
> And my heart's criss-crossings give birth to bamboo and rock.
> What is about to be produced in abundance cannot be retained,
> And will erupt on your snow-white walls...[181]
>
> 枯腸得酒芒角出, 肝肺槎生竹石.
> 森然欲作不可回, 寫向君家雪色壁.

What is divinely imparted in a dream is retained by the heart-mind;

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180. Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih, *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, 192–94.
181. Su Shi, *Collected Poems*, volume 11, 21b. Reprinted in Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), text 56.

Awakened, one relies on the hand, forgetting brush technique...[182]
夢中神授心有得, 覺來信手筆已忘.

Why should a high-minded man study painting?
The use of the brush comes naturally to him.
It is like those good at swimming,
Each of whom can handle a boat.[183]

高人豈學畫? 用筆乃其天.
譬如善游人, 一一能操船.

Like the untrammeled painters of written histories, Su Shi praises alcohol for its inspirational qualities, leaving him helpless in the face of an overpowering urge to paint. That his account involves drinking and then painting without concern for technique shows the influence of earlier *yipin* theory. In a final remark, he likens the literate man's knack for painting to an old *Zhuangzi* parable of a swimmer who tells Confucius the secret to his excellence in boating. Only after years of dwelling in water could he learn its nature, the swimmer attests, and thereby gain the innate knowledge to handle any boat.[184]

These accounts by Su Shi mark the beginning of a new trend in painting theory, one which begins with one subtle theoretical shift. Prior to this last example, the excerpts introduced in the preceding pages, including the first by Su Shi, all share one fundamental principle: the dissolution of the individual self in the creative act. The painter transcends his ordinary consciousness, surrenders himself to merge with divine powers, and then allows forces of nature to create through him. In this last example, Su introduces

182.Ibid., volume 11, 18a–b. Reprinted in Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), text 57.
183.Su Shi, *Dongpo quanji* 東坡全集 (Shanghai: Zhonghua shu chu, 1927), 84.Reprinted in Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), text 58.
184.*DZ* 670：*Nanhua zhenjing*, 4.3a.

self-awareness into the equation. The hand of the painter is no longer absent in the creative process; in this new developing paradigm, the artist's hand becomes the purpose of the art, the traces of his brush now believed to shed light on his moral stature, not necessarily his capacity to channel divine energies. Not only is a sense of self-awareness absent from the translations presented above, examples of artistic ability originating within the individual painter himself in painting literature prior to the end of the eleventh century are scant—if present at all. Thus, not until the time of Su Shi and others writing within his social circle do we find the Daoist-inspired paradigm of preceding centuries blended with a developing interest in artistic self-expression.

When examined in close detail, it becomes clear that this new trend toward individual expression—what would develop in subsequent centuries into the Confucian art of literati painting—derives its basic tenets from ideas originally inspired by Daoism. In earlier cases, we saw that painters of all classes were praised not for their technical ability, but for their ability to forego discursive thought and allow shaping-and-transforming to take place in their absence. Their ability to get out of their own way, so to speak, was the point of praise; the excellent painter was not painting, but *allowing things to be*. Thus, the superior mind was the mind in touch with the Dao, was therefore the most apt in this art of sidestepping the ego. Su Shi and his contemporaries viewed literati painting in much the same vein. At this early phase in the development of literati painting theory, Chinese scholars were simply adopting an understanding that had been in the works since ninth-century art theorists first brought new Daoist elements into painting discourse. Because it was the aim of scholar-official artists to paint in the most elite mode

possible, it made sense for them to appropriate the *yipin* style, one which had been developed through the lens of Daoism for over two hundred years and had been deemed superlative in the beginning of the eleventh century.

It is important to note that the theoretical shift in creative agency from the divine to the individual seems to have developed near the end of the eleventh century, and it was therefore not simply a byproduct of the change in dynasties, as some scholars have put forth. In her discussion of the Song tendency toward self-expression, for example, Sarah Fraser writes "Tang's regulation [by the divine] is Song's freedom and action."[185] By this she refers to her viewpoint that art theorists in the Song no longer deem necessary a harmonious relationship between artist and nature in order to achieve success in painting. Yet, as we have seen in the excerpts provided in this chapter, a great many art theorists (including some who were artists themselves) writing in the eleventh century attribute artistic excellence to the painter's success in becoming coherent with natural forces. It is not that images of shaping-and-transforming (*zaohua*) intervening with the artistic process "drop out of fashion by the Northern Song dynasty,"[186] as Fraser suggests; rather, these ideas become more fully articulated in the eleventh century, only to be reformulated by Su Shi and his milieu, finally becoming completely absorbed into what would ultimately become literati painting theory.

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185. Sarah Fraser, *Performing the Visual: The Practice of Buddhist Wall Painting in China and Central Asia, 618–960*, 212.
186. Sarah Fraser, *Performing the Visual: The Practice of Buddhist Wall Painting in China and Central Asia, 618–960*, 211.

# Conclusion

As stated in the introduction, by demonstrating how intellectual interest in the application of Daoist thought to aesthetic philosophy contributed to the elevation of the *yipin* class of painters in the eleventh century, this thesis has sought to challenge the conventional understanding of medieval Chinese painting theory as it currently stands in Western scholarship. The forerunner of the current mainstream view is Wen C. Fong, who, continuing a trend begun by James Cahill several decades previously, argues for the predominance of Neo-Confucian thought in his study of a genre of Chinese painting known as monumental landscape, which developed during the Five Dynasties (907–960) and flourished in the Northern Song. In his two publications on this topic, the second being a more refined version of the first, Wen Fong posits that the rise and consistent popularity of the genre derive from contemporary trends in Neo-Confucian thinking that assert the inherent moral coherence between human beings and the natural world. While this interpretation may be valid for certain painters active in the latter half of the eleventh century, it falls short in its effort to link all of monumental landscape painting to the single umbrella term "Neo-Confucianism." By reevaluating Fong's argument in light of more recent scholarship, including some points presented in my own thesis, we can better understand the socio-historical context that gave rise to—and sustained for approximately two centuries—the genre of monumental landscape painting. What we discover is that the new interest in landscape as a subject matter did not blossom out of a collective artistic exploration of the Confucian morality inherent in the natural world, but rather seems to have developed because several prominent tenth century artists, painting at a time when

Daoist thought was still central to the aesthetic theory, fled to the mountains and continued their practice after the fall of the Tang dynasty.

Only near the end of the eleventh century, when the school of Daoxue 道學 was becoming established under the sponsorship of the Cheng brothers, did art theorists begin to interpret landscape painting through what we might call a "Neo-Confucian" lens. There were certainly earlier Confucian thinkers of the late Tang and Five Dynasties periods exploring Buddhist and Daoist texts; however, it is an oversimplification to label them "Neo-Confucian." Studies conducted within the last decade—particularly those by Peter Bol and Hilde De Weerdt—have revealed that the problems of assumed lineage continuity and blurred doctrinal distinctions necessarily come with using the term "Neo-Confucianism" to describe nascent trends in Confucian thinking prior to the middle eleventh century.[187] The main teachings of what we know in English as "Neo-Confucianism" emerged from the philosophical teachings of the eleventh-century brothers Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107) and Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032–1085), and, as with many new intellectual developments, their writings took several decades to reach the mainstream.[188] In his most recent work on Neo-Confucianism, Peter Bol clearly states that the movement did not become central to literati life until the twelfth century. Yet, despite these facts, Wen Fong frequently labels painters and art theorists living in earlier times as "Neo-Confucian."[189] One possible explanation for Fong's loose application of the term may be that he was working in the mid-90's, a time when academic interest in Neo-Confucianism was just

187.See Bol (2008) and De Weerdt (2007).
188.Peter K. Bol, “Neo-Confucianism in History,” 79-80.
189.Peter K. Bol, “Neo-Confucianism in History,” 79.

beginning to burgeon.[190] While some twelfth-century art theorists seem to have understood monumental landscape painting in terms of Neo-Confucianism, as Fong rightly points out, it is inaccurate to claim that its central tenets inspired the rise of monumental landscape painting in the middle of the tenth century.

If not Neo-Confucianism, then we must take another look at the artists and art theorists of the tenth century to determine what contemporary factors may have led to a heightened interest in landscape painting. There are several places within Wen Fong's chapters where he either mislabels other philosophical ideas as "Neo-Confucian," or applies the term to scholar-officials who were, more accurately speaking, simply traditional Confucians living in a pluralistic time. One rather striking example of this appears in the opening paragraph of the more recent of his two publications, the chapter in *Possessing the Past*, wherein he quotes Zhang Zao, the quintessential "mediumistic" painter of the second chapter (above), and deems his words the core philosophy of monumental landscape painting: "A reaching outward to imitate Creation, [a]nd a turning inward to master the mind."[191] Translated more precisely, the quotation reads as follows: "Externally I take shaping-and-transforming [or Creation] as my teacher; within I obtain [from] the fountainhead of [my] heart-mind" (外師造化，中得心源).[192] The notion of "taking shaping-and-transforming as teacher" has its roots in sixth-century painting criticism; the earliest surviving work to include it is the *Continued Classification of Painters, Xuhua pin* 續畫品, written by Yao Zui as a continuation of Xie He's famous *Classification*

190.Peter K. Bol, “Neo-Confucianism in History,” 3.
191.For this translation of Zhang Zao, see *Possessing the Past: Treasures From the National Palace Museum, Taipei, 122.*.
192.*LDMHJ*.

*Record of Ancient Painters, Guhua pinlu* 古畫品錄.[193] The concept of learning directly from shaping-and-transforming and accessing its power through the individual heart-mind derives not from an early form of Neo-Confucianism, as Fong suggests, but from the Daoist tradition, which has been discussed in great detail in this thesis. Furthermore, contemporary accounts of Zhang Zao's painting practice associate him directly with the Daoist religion. As discussed in chapter two, the scholar-official and poet Fu Zai believed Zhang Zao had the capability to channel forces of nature directly and passively allow them to create art through him. Another contemporary account in the *Record of Famous Painters from Successive Dynasties*, which also appears in later volumes, venerates Zhang Zao as a "master of grasping two brushes, [who could] at the same time place them down together, one making a living [tree] branch, the other a withered one (能手握雙管，一時齊下，一為生枝，一為枯幹)," an unconventional practice reminiscent of the early Daoist *yipin* painter Zhang Zhihe.[194] Thus, given the untrammeled nature of Zhang Zao's practice, the descriptive accounts of his contemporaries, and the Daoist allusions in his own words, it seems most accurate to place him into the category of artists inspired by Daoism characteristic of the late Tang.

Another early art theorist whom Wen Fong prematurely connects to eleventh-century Neo-Confucian thought is Jing Hao 荊浩 (ca.870–ca.930), one of the first monumental landscape masters of the Five Dynasties era. He was a Confucian scholar who served a minor post until the fall of the Tang in 907; thereafter, he retired to a valley

193.*XHP*
194.*LDMHJ*.

called Honggu in Mount Taihang, where he presumably lived by farming.[195] His work titled *Notes on the Art of the Brush, Bifa ji* 筆法記, the earliest extant text dedicated exclusively to landscape, written after his move to Honggu valley, reveals an author steeped in a Confucian education who was also versed in the *Yijing* and fond of Daoist folklore. The text takes the form of a Daoist fable, wherein the author meets an enigmatic mountain man who shares the secrets of painting, only to disappear without a trace at the story's end. While on the surface quite characteristically Daoist, the message that the character delivers blends together Confucian and Daoist thought, particularly the shared adherence of the two traditions to the *Yijing*. Aside from the framework of the story being modeled on Daoist lore, references to Daoist texts are less frequent than in the works studied above; however, Jing Hao still demonstrates a reliance on Daoist principles, for example when the old man tells him that "only when the brush and ink are forgotten is there Real Landscape" (可忘筆墨而有真景).[196] The concept of "forgetting the brush and ink" recall the ancient Daoist meditation technique of the *Zhuangzi* known as *zuowang* 坐忘, or "sitting and forgetting."[197] This notion manifests itself in several accounts detailed above, and was also articulated quite beautifully by the Tang dynasty poet and lay Daoist Li Bai 李白 (701–762):

> The birds have vanished down the sky.
> Now the last cloud drains away.
> We sit together, the mountain and me,
> until only the mountain remains.[198]

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195. Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih, *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, 301.
196. Jing Hao 荊浩, *Bifa ji* 筆法記, in *ZGHLLB*, 608.
197. *DZ* 670: *Nanhua zhenjing*, 2.9a.
198. Translation by Sam Hamill, *Crossing the Yellow River: Three Hundred Poems from the Chinese* (Rochester, NY: BOA Editions, 2000), 94.

眾鳥高飛盡, 孤雲獨去閑.
相看兩不厭, 只有敬亭山.

While educated in the Confucian tradition, the painter Jing Hao has no problem introducing aspects of Daoist lore and philosophy into his discussion of painting. This quality of his writing places him squarely in the pluralistic tradition characteristic of the intellectual culture of the Five Dynasties and Northern Song. Thus, rather than attempting to label Jing Hao as a forerunner of Neo-Confucian philosophy, we might instead conclude that Jing Hao's interest in landscape as a subject grew out of his experience living directly in the mountains after the fall of the Tang.

Aside from the ahistorical application of the term "Neo-Confucianism," the main problem with Wen Fong's interpretation arises from the lack of attention paid to the personal history of the painters themselves. For example, Fong claims that the Northern Song painter Fan Kuan's painting titled *Travelers Amid Mountains and Streams*, which dates to circa 1000, "epitomizes the early Northern Song vision of the cosmic order at its grandest," which Fong then interprets in Neo-Confucian terms of the late eleventh century. Yet, in the above discussion of Dong You, who was active after the development of Neo-Confucianism, we saw that, despite the fact that he was living after the emergence of this new philosophical trend, he still understood Fan Kuan in explicitly Daoist terms. Furthermore, in suggesting that Fan Kuan painted with a sense of Neo-Confucian morality in mind, Wen Fong has left out important details of Fan Kuan's biography. Guo Ruoxu's late eleventh century text the *Record of Things Seen and Heard About Painting* tells us that Fan Kuan's "manner and appearance had an antique severity, his behavior was rude and rustic, it was his nature to crave wine, and he loved the Way" (寬儀狀峭古,

進止疎野, 性嗜酒, 好道).[199] Beyond this, he is also said to have spent his days in the mountains; taken together, these descriptions call to mind the image of a Daoist recluse, not a Confucian philosopher. As for Guo Xi, the great monumental landscape master who lived several decades after Fan Kuan, the links between him and the Daoist tradition were discussed in detail in the third chapter, above. Bearing in mind the place of Daoism in the personal histories of the individuals responsible for developing and perpetuating the genre of monumental landscape painting, it would seem that the religion may have played a greater role in this new artistic trend than we once imagined.

In sum, the "Neo-Confucian" interpretation of the rise of monumental landscape painting seems to be more a product of retrospective historiography than an accurate reconstruction of tenth-century aesthetic tastes and historical circumstances. It is characteristic of early Neo-Confucian scholarship to accept the tradition's lineage assertions at face value and assume a consistent stream of ideas from the late Tang to the thirteenth century; however, more detailed work in this period has shown that no precise lineage existed until the time of Zhu Xi.[200] One may argue that the Neo-Confucian interpretation seems compelling due to Fong's focus on the innate coherence (*li* 理) between human morality and nature; in short, he posits that painters became interested in learning about their own morality by intensely studying the outside world. Yet, it is not that the Neo-Confucians had a monopoly on the concept of *li* 理; in fact, this term had been the subject of philosophical inquiry within all Three Teachings for centuries leading up to the development of monumental landscape. Furthermore, while it is likely true that painters

199.Guo Ruoxu, *THJWZ*. Translated in Soper (1951), 57.
200.See Bol (2008), especially chapter three.

were interested in the relationship between themselves and the natural world around them, such curiosities would have derived from philosophies and texts prior to the development of Neo-Confucianism, among which the *Yinfu jing* (discussed above), which emphasizes exactly this "hidden accordance (*yinfu* 陰符)" between man and the universe, seems to be a likely source of inspiration. Aside from philosophical motivations, recent research also suggests that some monumental landscape paintings may have been used to represent Daoist paradises in tomb arrangements, a practice which may well have prompted the origin of this genre.[201] In any case, by viewing Five Dynasties and Northern Song aesthetics in terms of intellectual pluralism, scholars of this period will be better equipped to further explore the religious practices and historical circumstances which inspired the genre of monumental landscape painting.

Despite the development of Neo-Confucianism in the second half of the eleventh century and the continuous growth of the Buddhist religion during the Northern Song dynasty, the painting texts of this period show a comparatively heavier reliance on Daoist terms and concepts. The predominance of Daoist elements in Northern Song aesthetics results from the gradually increasing valorization of Daoist modes of production that had been building since the Tang dynasty. In the present study, we have explored the works of a number authors of the Northern Song who have discussed painting theory, including but not limited to Huang Xiufu, Goulong Shuang, Guo Ruoxu, Huang Tingjian, Dong You, and Su Shi, all of whom were Confucian scholars. Yet, not only were some them also Buddhists and Daoists, their writings reveal that their understanding of painting in

201.Craig Clunas, *Art in China*, 53-57.

general, and creativity in particular, derives directly from the Daoist textual tradition. Their Confucian educations grounded these men in a knowledge of history, politics, and morality, yet nowhere in the classical Confucian corpus do we find alternative sources for the explicitly Daoist references found in Northern Song painting theory. In fact, a database search for the term *zaohua* ("shaping-and-transforming"), which, as we have seen, is a Daoist term central to medieval Chinese painting theory, reveals that it does not appear a single time in the classical Confucian texts.[202] Moreover, it was not the case that Daoist texts such as the *Zhuangzi* and the *Yinfu jing* were integrated into Confucian education, as James Cahill has suggested;[203] these texts, like the scriptures of Buddhism which several Northern Song scholars were also known to have enjoyed, lie external to Confucian thought, and functioned for these thinkers in an altogether different way. In the pluralistic intellectual culture of the Northern Song, the literati very often turned to Buddhism and Daoism to guide their religious and private lives. I therefore suggest that a pluralistic view of Northern Song intellectual history serves as a much more fruitful standpoint from which to examine painting theory. From this perspective, it is easier to grasp how an author like Su Shi could turn to the *Analects* when writing about statecraft, and, in the same day, turn to the *Zhuangzi* when writing about art.

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202.Search conduced on the Hanquan 寒泉 Database.
203.James Cahill, “Confucian Elements in the Theory of Painting.”

# Images and Charts

Figure 1: An illustration of Zhang Zhihe's ascension taken from a reprint of the Ming dynasty collection of woodblock prints titled the *Complete Biography of Immortals, Liexian quanzhuan* 列仙全傳.

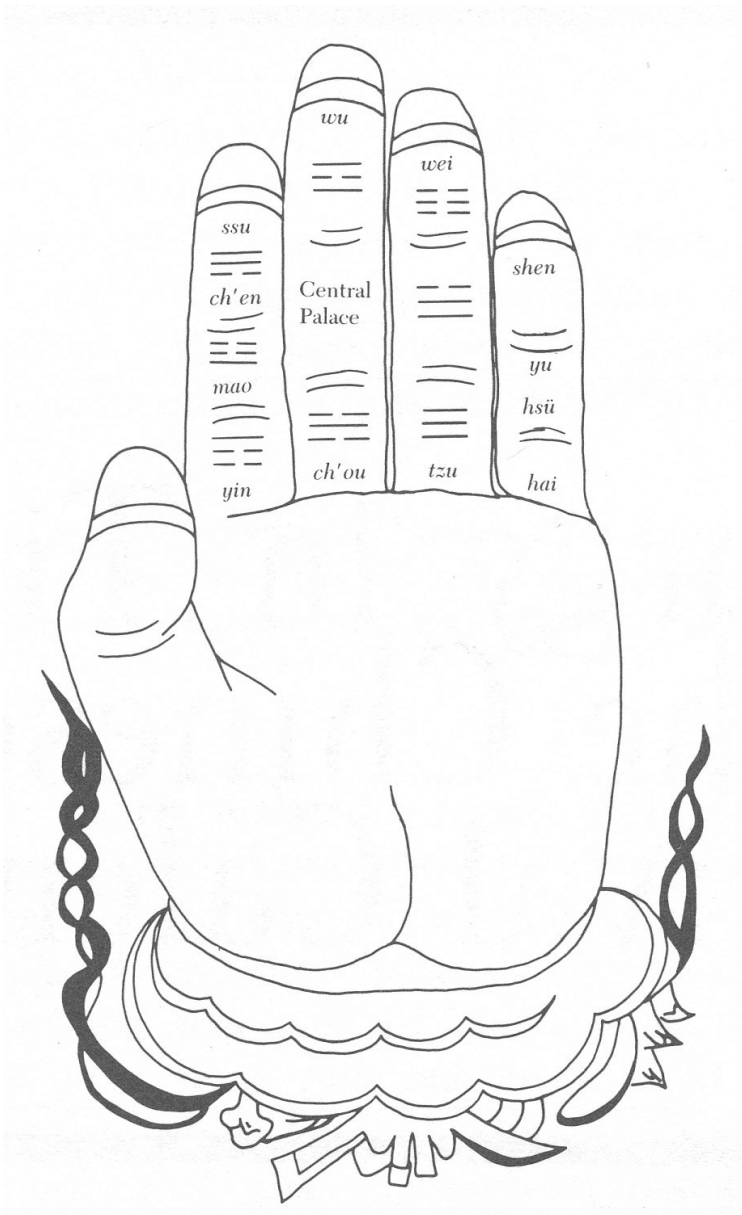


Figure 2: Diagram of the posterior Heaven arrangement of the eight trigrams, here conceptualized as a microcosm of the universe contained within the hand of a Daoist High Priest. Image taken from a Daoist secret liturgical manual and reprinted in John Lagerwey, *Taoist Ritual in Chinese Society and History*, 17.

Figure 3: Image of Xi Kang 嵇康, one of the legendary Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove. This is a rubbing from the Nan Zhao Period tomb in Nanjing first excavated in 1960.

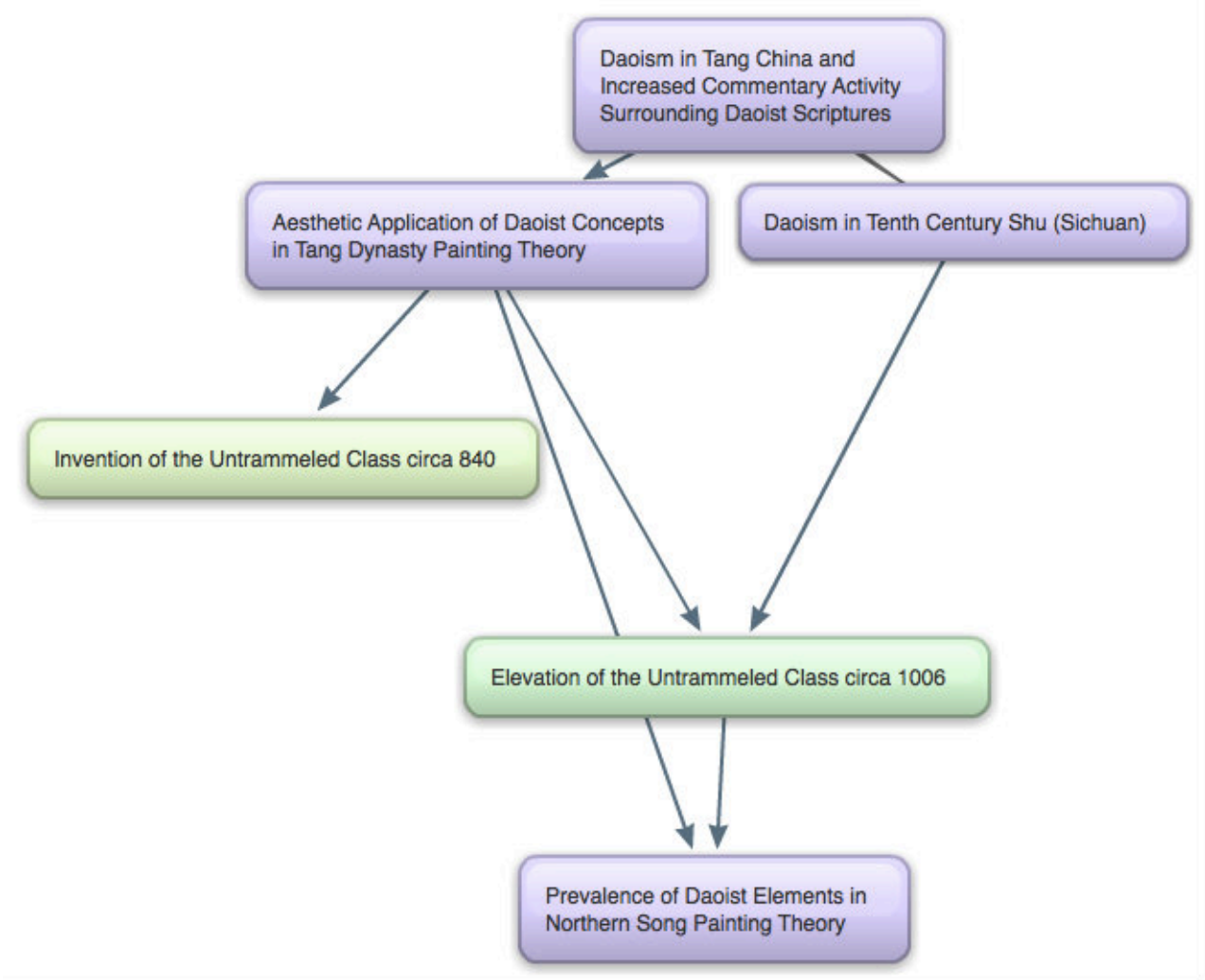


Chart 1: Conceptual diagram of the relationship between Daoism and the untrammeled classification of painters from its invention circa 840 to the effects of its elevation after 1006.

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