

The Contemporary Expression of Chinese Landscape Painting's Philosophy: Transformation Pathways and Cultural Values of Traditional Thought

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Abstract

Chinese landscape painting, a treasure of Eastern art, utilizes a distinctive ink-and-brush language to portray nature, encapsulating the aesthetic values and spiritual aspirations of the Chinese people and acting as a crucial representation of traditional Chinese culture. However, in the context of globalization and modernization, research on the traditional philosophical thought within Chinese landscape painting has tended to prioritize technical analysis over ideological transformation, lacking a systematic theoretical framework.

This study integrated multiple methodologies, including documentary research, iconographic analysis, and interdisciplinary approaches to decode the visual expression mechanisms of traditional philosophical thought. The research constructed a "Technique–Symbol–Thought" tripartite mapping model and proposed a threefold pathway for contemporary transformation: formal deconstruction, symbolic metonymy, and philosophical core reinvention, demonstrating its multidimensional value in modern therapeutic aesthetics, cultural identity reconstruction, and global civilizational dialogue. By bridging the theoretical gap between traditional thought and contemporary art, this study provided an operable academic paradigm and practical pathways for the creative transformation of traditional culture.

Keywords: Chinese Landscape Painting; Traditional Philosophical Thought; Contemporary Expression; Transformative Pathways

Introduction

In the intersecting context of globalization and modernization, the contemporary transformation of traditional culture and art has emerged as a critical academic and cultural discourse. According to the *2023–2029 China Traditional Chinese Painting Industry Market Operation and Investment Strategy Planning Report* (2023), the Chinese painting market demonstrated sustained growth between 2019 and 2021, with contemporary Chinese painting accounting for the highest share at 38.2%. This reflects the vitality of contemporary ink painting creation and the growing scholarly interest in related cultural studies (Deng & Dechsubha, 2025).

As a visual embodiment of traditional philosophical thought, Chinese landscape painting encapsulates the ancients' profound understanding of cosmic order and existential meaning. However, its philosophical dimensions face significant challenges in modern reinterpretation (Diep, 2016). Existing research has largely focused on techniques, historical evolution, or iconography, with insufficient attention paid to the systematic excavation of Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist thought, as well as the mechanisms through which these ideas may be transformed in contemporary contexts. As a result, traditional philosophical meanings are often simplified or misrepresented in modern interpretations.

Although certain scholars have begun to trace the philosophical foundations of landscape painting—such as Law's (2011) exploration of the metaphysical origins of artistic conception—there remains a lack of a comprehensive and systematic theoretical framework. Moreover, inquiries into the pathways through which traditional philosophical thought is transformed within contemporary artistic practice are still relatively underdeveloped.

Against this backdrop, the present study focuses on the philosophical ideas embedded in Chinese landscape painting. By integrating documentary research, iconographic analysis, and interdisciplinary approaches, this research aims to investigate the representational forms and spiritual connotations of traditional philosophy, and to explore its transformation across contemporary creative concepts, expressive techniques, and modes of dissemination. In doing so, the study seeks to systematically articulate the cultural values of this embedded philosophical thought, envision its developmental prospects, and construct a theoretical framework that supports the creative transformation and innovative development of traditional Chinese philosophy in modern artistic practice. Ultimately, this research aspires to uncover the cultural significance and practical relevance of landscape painting in contemporary society.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate the expression and intrinsic meaning of traditional Chinese philosophical thought in landscape painting.
2. To explore the transformation pathways of philosophical thought from traditional landscape painting into contemporary art.
3. To develop the cultural value and future prospects of the philosophical thought embedded in Chinese landscape painting.

Literature Review

1. Studies on Chinese Landscape Painting

The study of Chinese landscape painting has coalesced around three principal domains: aesthetic appreciation, technical methodology, and philosophical connotation. While this triadic structure reflects a foundation of sustained scholarly accumulation, it also reveals a deeper lacuna—namely, the insufficient attention paid to the contemporary transformation of its embedded philosophical content.

Aesthetic-oriented research has generally centered on the artwork itself, employing stylistic comparison and analysis of *yijing* (artistic conception) to construct systems of authentication and periodization. Since the turn of the 21st century, the integration of iconographic analysis and digital methodologies—such as the quantitative study of compositional elements by Feng Xiang's research (2025)—has further deepened the study of visual symbolism. Nevertheless, these case-based approaches often suffer from a methodological limitation: the tendency to interpret painting solely through painting, with insufficient engagement in broader philosophical integration.

Research on traditional techniques has largely remained at the level of historical systematization, particularly concerning brush-and-ink paradigms. More recent studies have turned toward the application of new materials and modern media (Law, 2011). However, such investigations rarely probe the underlying cultural logic of these transformations.

Compared with these two domains, the philosophical inquiry into Chinese landscape painting emerged relatively late, gradually shifting from “philosophical origins” to “contemporary interpretation.” Duan Lian (2017) examined compositional transformations to reveal the historical evolution from Daoist notions of “emptiness and stillness” (*xu jing*) to Chan Buddhist ideas of “illuminating the mind and seeing one’s true nature” (*mingxin jianxing*). Yet this approach,

grounded in a linear historiographical perspective, fails to account for the pluralistic syntheses evident in contemporary creative practice.

In response, this study adopts an image-analytical methodology to excavate the philosophical implications embedded in pictorial space. Drawing upon Cultural Adaptation Theory, it seeks to construct viable pathways for the transformation of traditional thought. Furthermore, by employing Cultural Hermeneutics, the research aims to articulate the contemporary spiritual and cultural significance of Chinese landscape painting, thereby addressing the current fragmentation in the field and advancing a more integrated theoretical framework.

2. Studies on Traditional Chinese Philosophical Thought

Traditional Chinese philosophical thought is grounded in the triadic framework of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism (collectively known as Ru, Shi, Dao) (Gladston, 2014). These three traditions form the spiritual foundation of Chinese culture and have, in diverse ways, permeated the artistic creation of Landscape Painting (Yang, 2023). Early scholarship sought to establish connections between philosophical thought and artistic expression from an ontological perspective. For instance, Paul Gladston (2014) illustrated how Confucianism endows landscapes with ethical symbolism through analogies between nature and moral virtue; Daoism, with its emphasis on authenticity and natural spontaneity, inspired depictions of genuine natural scenery; and the Chan Buddhist notion of sudden enlightenment gave rise to transcendent and introspective imagery. Yang Qing (2023) further proposed that these traditions influence the creative logic of Landscape Painting through a philosophical structure of “essence and application,” shaping everything from the representation of form to the expression of spirit, from conceptual intention to compositional organization.

While these studies have laid a foundational framework linking philosophy and art, two principal limitations remain. First, much of the existing research remains at the level of macro-level ideological synthesis, lacking in-depth micro-level analysis of how Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist thoughts are concretely translated into visual symbolism, brush-and-ink techniques, and aesthetic paradigms (Duan, 2017). Second, there is a dearth of inquiry into how such philosophical ideas are contemporarily articulated in the context of cross-media creation in the digital age. Specifically, mechanisms for expressing Daoist spontaneity (*shun qi ziran*) and Buddhist self-cultivation (*xiuxin juewu*) in modern artistic forms have yet to be systematically explored (Yang, 2023).

In response to these gaps, this study adopts an interdisciplinary methodology to systematically map the narrative expression, technical encoding, and compositional construction of philosophical thought in traditional Landscape Painting. It further explores the pathways for transforming this philosophical content within contemporary artistic practice, thereby offering a theoretical framework for bridging the disconnect between traditional wisdom and modern expression.

3. Studies on the Artistic Expression and Cultural Connotation of Contemporary Landscape Painting

Contemporary Landscape Painting refers to artistic practices that, under modern cultural conditions, take natural landscapes as their central subject while integrating the spirit of traditional Chinese painting with contemporary artistic concepts (Feng, 2025). In recent years, both academia and the art world have increasingly focused on the inheritance of painting techniques and the pluralistic integration of styles in the context of globalization (Tu, 2020). In terms of artistic exploration, Tu Derrick (2020) observes that Contemporary Landscape Painting, while grounded in traditional styles, achieves expressive breakthroughs through decorative visual language and material innovation. For instance, Xu Bing's "*Background Story series*" (Figure 1) reconstructs landscape imagery using ready-made materials and backlighting installations.

Despite the growing body of relevant studies, there remains a notable deficiency in the examination of cultural connotations. Feng Xiang (2025) points out that many contemporary works simply juxtapose modern elements—such as QR codes—onto traditional compositions through mechanical collage, lacking deeper theoretical foundations.

This study, through an interdisciplinary approach, seeks to promote innovative expressions of traditional philosophical thought within Contemporary Landscape Painting. It aims to balance technical practice and theoretical construction, thereby addressing the current theoretical lacunae and practical challenges in the field.

4. Research Gaps and Theoretical Response of This Study

In summary, current scholarship reveals three core areas of insufficiency. First, at the level of foundational research on landscape painting, studies on aesthetic appreciation overly rely on individual cases, while technical investigations remain confined to descriptions of operational procedures. Meanwhile, inquiries into cultural connotation suffer from insufficient historical contextualization and have not established a mechanism for translating traditional meanings into

modern contexts, leading to a disjunction between classical philosophical thought and contemporary environments.

Second, within research on traditional philosophical ideas, there is no systematic theory on how Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist thoughts are visually embodied in paintings. Moreover, the expression of traditional concepts such as "accordance with nature" or "knowing one's true mind" in the digital context lacks theoretical guidance.

Third, contemporary studies on landscape painting often remain at the level of superficial symbol application, and the use of digital media lacks theoretical grounding, resulting in a disconnection between technological innovation and humanistic inquiry.

To address these gaps, this study constructs a theoretical framework based on three interrelated theoretical components (Table 1).

Table 1 Summary of Research Gaps and Theoretical Responses.

Research Area	Research Gaps	Theoretical Response
Foundational Studies on Landscape Painting	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of philosophical system connection. 2. Lack of integration of skills and ideas. 3. Lack of traditional modern transformation mechanism 	<p>Method: Iconological Analysis (Panofsky, 1955)</p> <p>Objective: Construct a model linking technique and philosophical thought.</p>
Studies on Traditional Philosophical Thought	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The presentation of philosophical ideas lacks systematic theory. 2. Lack of guidance for expression in the digital age. 	<p>Method: Two-Dimensional Acculturation Model (Berry, 1974)</p> <p>Objective: Develop a mechanism for digital-era adaptation of traditional philosophy.</p>
Contemporary Landscape Painting Studies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reconstruction lacking deep meaning. 2. Lack of theory in digital media creation. 	<p>Method: Cultural Hermeneutics (Gadamer, 2013)</p> <p>Objective: Articulate the contemporary cultural value of philosophical ideas in landscape painting.</p>

Research Methodology

1. Literature Review Method

This study focuses on the contemporary expression of philosophical thoughts in Chinese landscape painting, integrating Chinese and foreign literatures, and unfolds from three dimensions: historical tracing, theoretical deconstruction, and contemporary transformation. The research content mainly covers four parts.

First, combing through ancient philosophical documents and painting theories to trace the evolution of philosophical concepts. Second, analyzing the theoretical achievements of renowned scholars such as Law (2011) and Van Thi Diep (2016) to understand the mainstream views in the research field. Third, fully investigating contemporary landscape creation practices to reveal the cultural context of contemporary creation. Fourth, constructing an ideological genealogy by integrating philosophical interpretations of Paul Gladston (2014) and others, providing literary support for the analysis of philosophical connotations.

2. Iconological Analysis Method

This study applies Erwin Panofsky's (1955) iconological framework, specifically his three-tiered method of image interpretation, consisting of formal analysis, iconographic decoding, and philosophical interpretation (Figure 1).

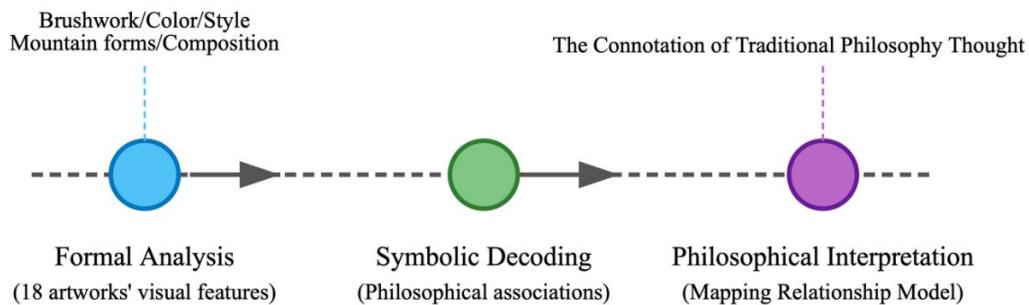


Figure 1 Analytical Framework for Iconology (Source: Constructed by researcher)

The research proceeds by selecting eighteen representative works of ancient Chinese landscape painting. A formal analysis is first conducted focusing on five essential visual elements: mountain formations, compositional structure, brush-and-ink techniques, color application, and aesthetic style. These visual features are then subjected to iconographic decoding to infer their symbolic associations with traditional philosophical thought. In the final phase, these associations are philosophically interpreted, and a conceptual model is constructed to map the internal correspondences between landscape painting techniques and underlying philosophical ideas.

By employing this method, the study directly addresses the identified research gap concerning the disconnection between technique and ideology, thereby elucidating how traditional Chinese philosophical thought is visually manifested and conceptually embedded in landscape painting.

3. Interdisciplinary Analytical Method

This study employs an interdisciplinary approach, integrating theories from art studies, philosophy, religious studies, and cultural studies to explore the contemporary transformational pathways of traditional philosophy in landscape painting.

First, based on Berry's (1974) *Two-Dimensional Acculturation Model*, this research analyzes the representation of traditional philosophy in representative works, evaluating the balance between "original culture maintenance" and "mainstream culture contact." This analysis examines how traditional philosophical elements are preserved and adapted within contemporary artistic practices.

Subsequently, by integrating the iconological mapping between landscape painting and philosophy, this study distills the transformational mechanisms through which traditional philosophical concepts evolve in modern contexts.

Meanwhile, drawing on Gadamer's (2013) *Cultural Hermeneutics*, the research employs a three-step process—"textual interpretation," "fusion of horizons," and "value construction"—to reveal the cultural values and modern significance of these philosophical ideas. This hermeneutic framework emphasizes the integration of historical and contemporary dimensions, particularly using the concept of "fusion of horizons" to address the challenges of translating traditional philosophical connotations into the modern cultural context.

4. Research Framework

Overall, this study adopts a spiral and progressive research framework consisting of three stages: literature foundation – image analysis – interdisciplinary interpretation (Figure 3).

First, a vertical connection is established between philosophical thought and the historical development of landscape painting through a comprehensive literature review. Second, a horizontal model is constructed via iconological analysis to examine the integration of artistic techniques and conceptual ideas. Finally, the pathway of transformation from tradition to contemporaneity is opened up through the application of Cultural Adaptation Theory and Cultural Hermeneutics.

This framework systematically addresses the study's three core objectives. It not only fills the theoretical gaps identified in current scholarship but also proposes a research paradigm that combines academic rigor with practical value for the contemporary expression of traditional philosophical thought.

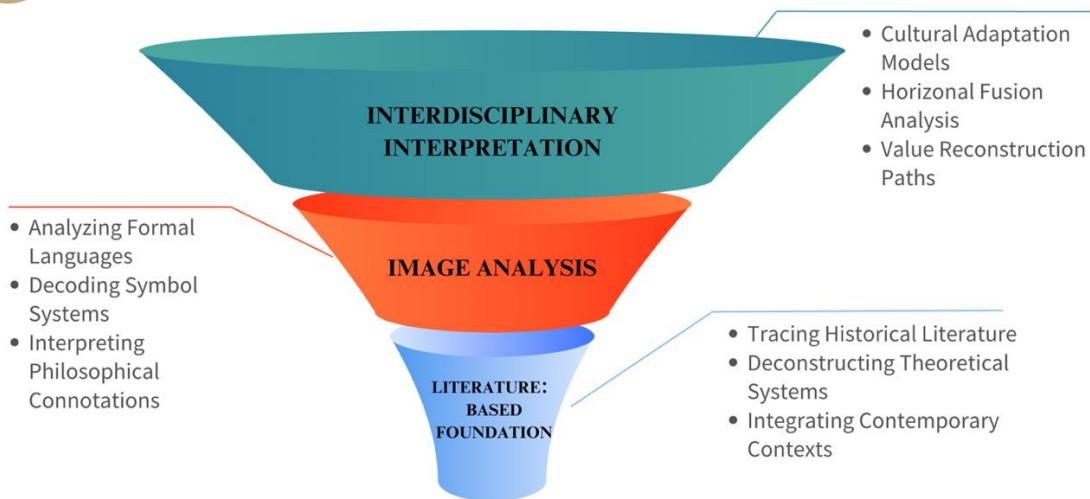


Figure 2 Research Framework (Source: Constructed by researcher)

Research results

1. The Expression and Connotation of Philosophy in Chinese Landscape Painting

This study employs three criteria (art historical influence; temporal span; stylistic diversity) to select 18 representative ancient landscape painting samples from the Song to Qing dynasties. The sample set encompasses various genres such as ink wash, freehand brushwork, and realistic painting, as well as the stylistic traditions of the Northern and Southern Schools. Based on Panofsky's (1955) three-tiered iconological analysis, the study conducted a progressive interpretation of these works, examining their formal language, symbolic systems, and philosophical essence. The findings are presented below.

1.1 Analysis of Formal Language: Philosophical Metaphors in Visual Elements of Landscape Painting

The study reveals that traditional Chinese landscape painting is not merely an artistic practice but a visual embodiment of Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist philosophical thought. Elements such as brushwork (*bimo*), compositional layout, and the treatment of negative space (*liubai*) are all imbued with traditional philosophical meaning.

For instance, in “*Travelers Among Mountains and Streams*” (Figure 4) by Fan Kuan, the composition employs the *gaoyuan* (lofty distance) technique and renders the central mountain using the *fupi cun* (axe-cut texture strokes) to form a monumental and geometric structure. The towering main peak occupies the visual center and rises into the clouds, while the travelers at the bottom appear minuscule, almost ant-like in contrast. This dramatic scale contrast and ordered

spatial hierarchy serve as a visual translation of the Confucian concept of *li* (ritual propriety), aligning with the ethical order of “hierarchy and propriety” and reflecting reverence for and conformity to the natural order.

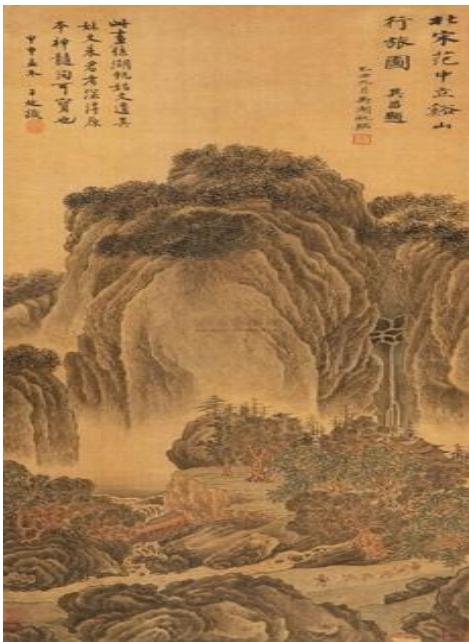


Figure 3 *Travelers Among Mountains and Streams*, Fan Kuan, Northern Song Dynasty

(Source: Retrieved from <https://image.baidu.com>)

1.2 Decoding the Symbolic System: The Philosophical Symbolism in Landscape Painting

The study finds that Chinese landscape painting effectively transforms Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist thought into a distinct symbolic system through its depictions of natural elements and compositional principles. Specific visual motifs serve as philosophical metaphors: for instance, pine trees often symbolize the Confucian ideal of the *junzi* (noble person); mist and clouds allude to the Daoist concept of *qihua* (transformation of *qi*); while pagodas and temples suggest the Chan Buddhist notion of *fanwo heyi* (the unity of the self and the Buddha).

A representative example is “*Lofty Mount Lu*” (Figure 5) by Shen Zhou of the Ming dynasty. The towering peak rising into the clouds and the meandering stream are rendered through panoramic composition, visually asserting Confucian notions of order and structure. Simultaneously, the inclusion of a secluded temple within the mountain hints at Chan Buddhist aesthetics, demonstrating a profound synthesis of natural imagery and philosophical thought.



Figure 4 *Lofty Mount Lu*, Shen Zhou, Ming Dynasty

(Source: Retrieved from <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/MMiBFBR-eaSl2kloLA7DOQ>)

1.3 Interpretation of the Philosophical Core: The Integrative Representation of Confucianism, Daoism, and Chan Buddhism in Landscape Painting

This study reveals that Chinese landscape painting constructs a unique artistic form by grounding itself in techniques, bridging through symbolic systems, and centering on the integration of Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist thought.

Confucian ideas are manifested in rigorous spatial composition and concrete narrative scenes. For example, “*Travelers Among Mountains and Streams*” (Figure 4) constructs an orderly landscape through precise perspective—monumental peaks, systematically arranged trees, travelers, and temples—embodying Confucianism’s active engagement with the world (*rushì*) and reverence for ethical order. Daoist philosophy, conversely, is expressed through freehand brushwork and the interplay of void and substance. Huang Gongwang’s “*Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains*” (Figure 6) uses fluid strokes to outline the riverbanks, with extensive blank space symbolizing Daoist *wu* (emptiness), visually articulating the principle of *ziran* (naturalness).



Figure 5 Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains, Huang Gongwang, Yuan Dynasty

(Source: Retrieved from <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/wUkBr2xuY4fSOUDyyifKCQ>)

Chan Buddhist thought is characterized by minimalist style and imagistic reconstruction. For example, “*Lofty Mount Lu*” creates an ethereal atmosphere through barren trees, an empty pavilion, and distant mountains, echoing Chan’s concepts of *kongguan* (empty observation) and *dunwu* (instant enlightenment). While Confucianism emphasizes order, Daoism nature, and Chan emptiness, these philosophies deeply integrate at symbolic and ideological levels, translating abstract thought into visual language and forming unique Chinese aesthetic concepts.

This discovery confirms that landscape painting is not merely a natural representation but a visual carrier of Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist thought, providing core references for contemporary artistic inheritance. In summary, the brushwork and composition of landscape painting are rooted in traditional philosophy, based on which the researchers constructed the "Mapping Model of Landscape Painting and Philosophical Thought" (Figure 7).

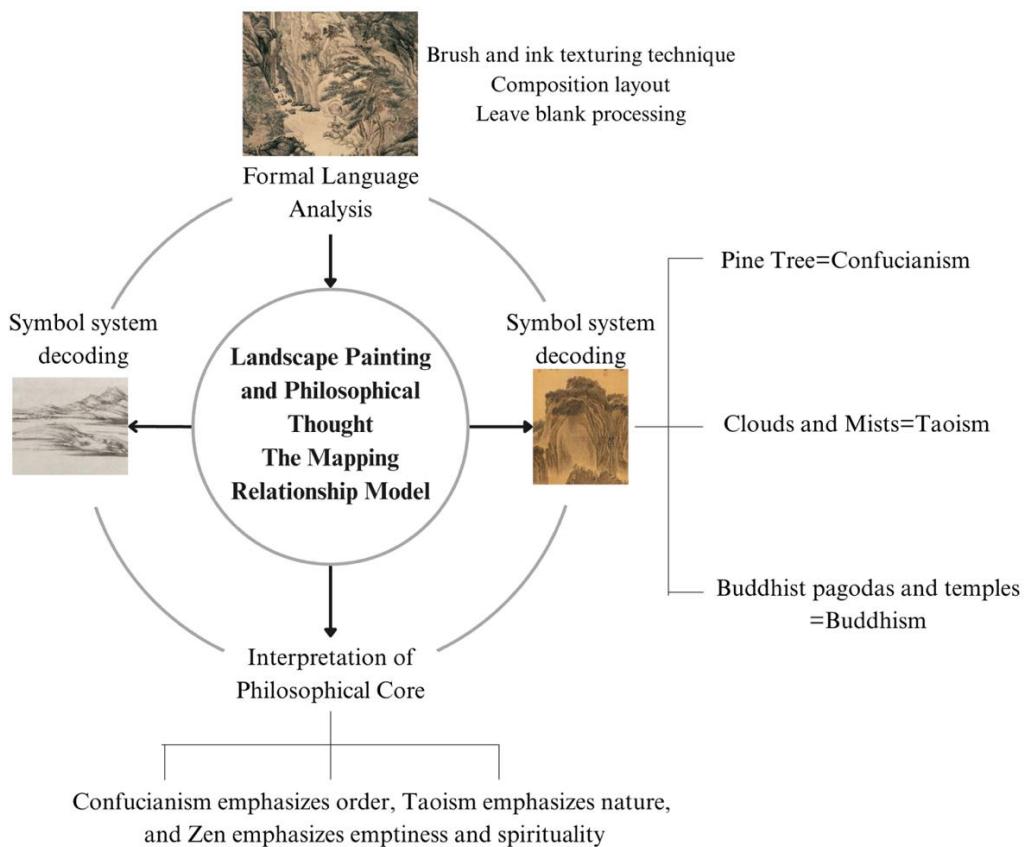


Figure 6 Reflective Model of Correspondence Between Landscape Painting and Philosophical Thought

(Source: Constructed by researcher)

2. Pathways for the Contemporary Transformation of Traditional Philosophical Thought

2.1 Case Studies in Contemporary Landscape Painting: The Preservation and Translation of Traditional Philosophical Thought

This study, through an in-depth analysis of contemporary landscape painting, identifies two primary pathways through which traditional philosophical ideas are innovatively preserved and translated in creative practices.

The first pathway involves material innovation as a vehicle for expressing traditional philosophy. A salient example is Xu Bing's *"Background Story: Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains"*, where he reconstructs the Yuan-dynasty masterpiece using everyday waste materials—such as branches and plastic bags—arranged behind frosted glass. The landscape emerges through light-shadow projection, embodying the Daoist principle of *ziran* (conformity to nature).

The second pathway features the fusion of traditional and new media to convey philosophical ideas. Contemporary artists often retain classical techniques while incorporating

modern media like acrylics and digital technology. “*New Book of Mountains and Seas trilogy*” (Figure 8) exemplifies this, integrating the traditional *fupi cun* (axe-cut texture) technique into digital painting. By reconstructing mountain textures with dynamic geometric lines, the work maintains Confucian visual elements of order while the fluidity of digital media transforms the traditional ethics of *zunbei youxu* (hierarchical order) into a modern reflection on technological progress and civilizational costs.

Both pathways achieve contemporary translation of traditional philosophy through formal innovation, providing practical paradigms for cultural inheritance in landscape painting.



Figure 7 *New Book of Mountains and Seas trilogy*, Qiu Anxiong, 2017

(Source: Retrieved from <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/6wH-ivgtk40aB7HZWuEhjw>)

2.2 Contemporary Transformation Pathways Based on the Model of Philosophical Mapping

Building upon the findings presented above and the previously proposed “mapping model between landscape painting and philosophical thought,” this study identifies a progressive tripartite pathway for the contemporary transformation of traditional philosophical thought within the context of Chinese landscape painting.

First, the deconstruction and reconstruction of formal visual language. The conventional formal vocabulary of traditional landscape painting—such as *cunfa* (textural strokes), *liubai* (intentional blankness), and compositional layout—may be deconstructed and reassembled in conjunction with modern visual composition principles.

Second, the metaphorical transformation and rebirth of symbolic systems. Traditional symbols such as pine, bamboo, plum blossoms, orchids, or pastoral figures like fishermen and

woodcutters can be detached from their original cultural context and reintegrated into contemporary settings through metaphoric or collage techniques.

Third, the abstraction and reconstruction of philosophical core. Classical philosophical concepts such as *tian ren he yi* (the unity of Heaven and humanity) and the *xu shi xiang sheng* (interplay of void and substance) may be abstracted and reconfigured as internalized spiritual frameworks that permeate artistic creation. Artists may employ minimalist compositions or experimental materials to convey contemporary interpretations of *Dao fa ziran*.

3. Cultural Value and Prospects for Development

Based on Gadamer's (2013) three-step hermeneutic framework of "text interpretation – fusion of horizons – value construction", this study systematically reveals the contemporary cultural value and developmental prospects of the philosophical connotations embedded in Chinese landscape painting. These are manifested in the following three dimensions:

3.1 The Therapeutic Value of Traditional Philosophical Thought in Modernity

This study finds that key tenets of Confucianism, Daoism, and Chan Buddhism—namely, the Confucian ethical order of *tian ren he yi* (the unity of Heaven and humanity), the Daoist ecological principle of *dao fa ziran* (the Way follows Nature), and the Chan Buddhist cultivation of mind through *kongguan* (emptiness observation)—offer meaningful therapeutic insights for addressing the existential challenges of modernity. Through visual practices such as the Chan-inspired aesthetic of *liubai* (intentional blankness), landscape painting creates a contemplative space in which the viewer encounters the dialectic of void and presence. This engenders an experiential realization of "emptiness yet not empty," establishing a spiritual buffer zone that alleviates urban psychological anxiety and underscores landscape painting's role as a cultural medium for the restoration of contemporary spiritual ecology.

3.2 Mechanisms for Transhistorical Reconstruction of Cultural Identity

In the reconstruction of cultural identity, landscape painting facilitates the integration of traditional philosophical thought and contemporary contexts through what Gadamer terms the "fusion of horizons." On one hand, artists embed classical symbols such as pine, bamboo, and mist into urban environments, recontextualizing Confucian notions of ethical order as a critical response to modern social crises. On the other hand, innovations in media—exemplified by Xu Bing's Background Story series—employ mixed materials and shadow play to extend the Daoist cosmology of *you wu xiang sheng* (the intergeneration of being and non-being) into ecological discourse, anchoring the idea of *tian ren he yi* within environmental ethics. These creative

translations elevate traditional cultural genes into contemporary resources for spiritual ecological renewal.

3.3 Prospects for Civilizational Dialogue in a Global Context

The research reveals that the philosophical dimensions of landscape painting possess significant potential for cross-cultural engagement in the context of globalization. First, the integration of immersive technologies such as VR and AR redefines the paradigm of cultural perception, transforming traditional aesthetics—such as *ke you ke ju* (livable and visitable spaces)—into cross-civilizational interfaces. Second, informed by Berry's (1974) bidirectional acculturation model, the philosophy of landscape painting offers alternative epistemologies to dominant Western aesthetic paradigms. By employing traditional techniques such as scattered perspective, Chinese painters present a vision of “diverse symbiosis” that contributes an Eastern model to global ecological aesthetics. Finally, the revitalization of social applications—such as embedding landscape imagery into urban renewal projects through public art—enables a multidimensional value output, from spiritual healing to spatial ethics and civic engagement.

In conclusion, the philosophical connotations embedded in Chinese landscape painting are not confined to historical contemplation but serve as dynamic cultural assets capable of responding to the challenges of modernity. They provide an Eastern wisdom paradigm that contributes to global conversations on ecological ethics and spiritual reconstruction.

Discussions

This study constructs a three-tier “technique–symbol–thought” model, revealing the deep relationship between Chinese landscape painting and the embedded philosophies of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. This model bridges the long-standing gap between visual formalism and philosophical interpretation, providing a theoretical foundation for the creative transformation of traditional art in the contemporary era.

Compared with Law (2011) seminal view that artistic conception (*yijing*) in Chinese art arises from the fusion of emotion and scene (*qing jing jiaorong*), this study extends the interpretive lens from aesthetic emotion to philosophical structure. While Li emphasizes the metaphysical grounding of artistic feeling, the present model emphasizes how visual language encodes and transmits structured philosophical ideas. In this way, the proposed framework complements and expands existing aesthetic theories by offering a more systematic decoding of the visual–philosophical interface.

A limitation of this study lies in its focus on traditional works from the Song to Qing dynasties. While these provide a solid foundation for analysis, they may not fully represent the diversity of experimental forms in the 20th and 21st centuries. Additionally, although the model demonstrates interdisciplinary applicability, further integration with empirical approaches—such as cognitive science or digital media analysis—is needed to verify its broader impact.

Nonetheless, by integrating Panofsky's iconology and Gadamer's hermeneutics, the study offers a coherent interdisciplinary methodology for analyzing the symbolic and philosophical dimensions of landscape painting. The proposed transformation pathway—consisting of visual deconstruction, symbolic transference, and philosophical reconstruction—is not only theoretically grounded but also demonstrably applicable in contemporary practices such as digital art, public installation, and cultural education.

In doing so, this research repositions traditional landscape painting as more than an aesthetic object: it is a carrier of cultural philosophy capable of informing modern visual expression, psychological healing, and even social management through values-based spatial design.

Knowledge from Research

This research generates three main contributions of new knowledge:

1. Model of the Mapping Relationship Between Landscape Painting and Philosophical Thought

Using image analysis, the study reveals intrinsic links between formal elements in traditional Chinese landscape painting—such as *cunfa* (texture strokes), *liubai* (blank space), and composition—and Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist philosophies. These insights form a three-tier theoretical model of “technique–symbol–thought.”

2. Threefold Pathway for the Contemporary Transformation of Traditional Philosophy

The study proposes a progressive mechanism of transformation. Which is the deconstruction of formal language, the metonymic shift of symbolic systems, and the reconstruction of philosophical core, effectively bridging the gap between tradition and modernity.

3. Three-Dimensional Cultural Value of Landscape Painting Philosophy

Based on cultural hermeneutics, the study reveals that landscape painting philosophy possesses multidimensional cultural value: it contributes to modern psychological healing, reconstruction of cultural identity, and civilizational exchange in a globalized context. These findings offer a Chinese cultural paradigm for global ecological ethics.

In summary, this research generates diverse and substantial new knowledge across three levels: theoretical, practical, and applied (Table 2).

Table 2 Summary of Contributions by Domain

Domain	Contribution
Theoretical	Developed a “mapping model” that systematically links formal language and symbols to philosophical thought.
Practical	Proposed a three-step transformation path—deconstruction, metonymy, reconstruction—for applying traditional philosophy in contemporary art.
Applied	Validated the multifaceted value of landscape painting philosophy in psychological healing, cultural identity formation, and global communication, promoting its role in social governance.

Conclusion

This study systematically examines the philosophical underpinnings of Chinese landscape painting and constructs a three-tiered relational model of “technique–symbol–thought” to reveal the deep mechanisms by which Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist ideas are embedded within its visual language. This model not only bridges the long-standing divide between formal analysis and philosophical interpretation in traditional scholarship, but also—through the integration of image analysis and cultural adaptation theory—provides a viable framework for the contemporary translation of traditional philosophical thought.

At the methodological level, the study innovatively synthesizes Panofsky’s iconology with Gadamer’s hermeneutics, thereby establishing a systematic decoding framework for the “visual philosophy” of landscape painting. This interdisciplinary paradigm offers both a new lens for the study of traditional Chinese art and a methodological innovation for symbolic interpretation in cross-cultural research. From a practical standpoint, the study proposes a progressive three-stage transformation mechanism—deconstruction, metonymic transference, and reconstruction—which offers concrete guidance for the inheritance and innovation of traditional culture in contemporary artistic practices, particularly within the domains of digital media and public art.

In terms of cultural significance, this research repositions Chinese landscape painting as a cultural resource capable of responding to the dilemmas of modernity. Its embedded Eastern philosophical wisdom provides a distinctive contribution to the construction of contemporary spiritual ecology.

Suggestions

Based on the study's findings and discussion, future research and practice can be expanded along three key dimensions:

First, academic research should promote interdisciplinary collaboration between art and cognitive science. Using neuroaesthetic methods—such as eye-tracking and EEG—researchers can empirically measure the psychological effects of philosophical elements like *liubai* (blank space) and *cunfa* (texturing) in landscape painting, supporting applications in art therapy.

Second, in technological innovation, VR/AR-based interactive projects should be developed to transform classical aesthetics such as “wanderable and livable landscapes” into immersive digital experiences—e.g., virtual recreations of Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains.

Third, in cultural dissemination and social application, the core philosophy of landscape painting can be integrated into public art and urban design. Examples include “mountain–water inspired” installations such as dynamic light-and-shadow *liubai* walls, creating therapeutic aesthetic spaces for urban life.

These directions not only address current limitations—such as technological gaps and sample constraints—but also offer practical strategies for revitalizing traditional culture in the digital age.

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