

Article

Visualizations of Mountain–Body Fusions in Medieval Chinese Philosophy, Art, and Religion

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Abstract: This paper examines how Chinese people affiliated with different religions and ideologies of the Song period (960–1279 CE) used artistic, literary and visual representations to merge mountains and the natural world with the human body. This fusion of natural and human worlds in representation appears in a variety of contexts, including paintings of famous Song landscape artists, writings of literati thinkers, architectural developments of Neo-Confucian scholars, body charts recorded in the Daoist Canon, and artwork connected to Chinese Buddhism. The paper asserts that Song Chinese people used art and other material objects not only for the purpose of representing the world in which they lived but also as a means of expressing, developing and empowering their religions and ideologies. So powerful were these material representations, in fact, that in certain cases, they may have acted as a primary conduit through which the religion or ideology was experienced. As the paper shows, the interaction between the non-material activity of *visualization* (how people create images in their minds) and *representation* (how people create material objects to reify the images in their minds) is often pivotal, as opposed to accessory, to some of the later ideological developments of the Chinese people.

Keywords: visualization; Chinese Literati; internal alchemy; Neo-Confucianism; Chinese Buddhism; Daoism; Liang Kai 梁楷; Chinese art; Medieval China; landscape painting; Chan Buddhism; Guo Xi 郭熙



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1. Introduction

The thesis of this paper is that Chinese people of the Song period (960–1279 CE) used art and other material objects to fuse the natural world, and in particular mountains, with the human body in ideological and symbolic ways. They did this not only for the purpose of representing the world in which they lived but also as a means of expressing, developing and empowering their religions and ideologies. So powerful were these material representations, in fact, that in certain cases, the works may have acted as a primary conduit through which the religion or ideology was experienced. As the paper shows, the interaction between the non-material activity of *visualization* (how people create images in their minds) and *representation* (how people create material objects to reify the images in their minds), is often pivotal, as opposed to accessory to some of the later ideological developments of the Chinese people.

This fusion of natural and human worlds in representation appears in a variety of contexts, including paintings of famous Song landscape artists, writings of literati thinkers, architectural developments of Neo-Confucian philosophers, body charts recorded in the Daoist Canon, and artwork connected to Chinese Buddhism. Examining sacred space of the Song period, the paper asserts that an important spatial synergy took place between physical representations and the philosophy and religions of medieval China: images had become intertwined with how different groups of people visualized the human body, as well as how these groups represented a human relationship at work with the natural world. In essence, Song representations of mountains, landscapes and other natural formations

act as material records of how people visualized their own bodies or the bodies of the state in microcosmic and macrocosmic form.

This paper is a distillation of the research and main ideas of Chinese Images of Body and Landscape: Visualization and Representation in the Religious Experience of Medieval China, my doctoral dissertation (Hennessey 2011). That work gives an in-depth view on mountain–body fusions in each of the traditions discussed in this paper.

2. Results

2.1. Envisioning the Mountain as Human Body: Literati Interest in the Material World and State Ideology in the Paintings and Sayings of Guo Xi 郭熙

This paper begins with an exploration of art and material culture connected to the imperial state of the Northern Song period (960–1127 CE). During this time, scholars and artists linked to the state and political sphere represented the natural world in their art and literature as symbolic of the human world. Such appreciation for nature had already existed within the literary arts of Chinese culture for some time. It was present, for example, during the Southern Dynasties (南朝 various dynasties of the fifth and sixth centuries CE) when yongwu 咏物 poems (poems devoted to “things”, and in particular, to detailed descriptions of natural world objects) flourished within the literary culture of the court (Bickford 1996, p. 21).

However, the emphasis on how the symbolic relationship between humans and the natural world could be represented in the visual arts took on a new and more complex dimension during the Song period. An interest in material objects from the natural world grew within the framework of Northern Song literati scholarship, for example, wherein famous scholar-officials (shi dafu 士大夫) such as Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101) and Ouyang Xiu 歐陽脩 (1007–1072) described natural world objects as emblematic of the human experience. Writing about the material world in which they lived, these scholars, the literati (wenren 文人), envisioned certain objects as representative of human character (see, for example, Egan 1994, 2005, 2006). In addition to their representation of these symbolic unions between natural world and human character in their writings, some of these scholars also began to represent this amalgamation in the form of ink monochrome paintings. In this way, the literati envisioned paintings of natural world objects such as bamboo and plum blossom as embedded symbolically with human characteristics such as nobility and intellectual vitality. The Song period thus saw the creation of a literati painting tradition (wenren hua 文人畫).

In the meantime, artists in the imperial city of Kaifeng 開封 worked as court painters at the Hanlin Academy (Hanlin xueshi yuan 翰林學士院), developing a tradition of landscape painting that flowered during the Northern Song period (Beisong shanshui hua 北宋山水畫). Painting ink and color onto very large hanging scrolls, usually made of silk, artists created impressive mountain settings for imperial and aristocratic audiences. Within the monumental landscape scroll, miniature images of people emerge, half hidden within the scene and overshadowed by the natural landscape itself.

One of the most well-known of these artists was Guo Xi 郭熙 (c. 1020–1090), a member of the literati class who was highly esteemed within the bureaucratic hierarchy of statesmen under Emperor Shenzong 神宗 (1048–1085). Much of our knowledge of Guo Xi is based on the writings of his son, Guo Si 郭思 (ca. 1050–after 1130), believed to have recorded his father’s sayings.

Guo Xi enjoyed a high rank not only as an artist but also as an official, ultimately becoming the first painter awarded civil rank within the history of the Northern Song Painting Academy. Appointed Scholar of Arts (yixue 藝學) and granted the position of Chief Daizhao 待詔 in the Hanlin Academy during his life, Guo Xi was after his death also granted the status of “Grand Master for Proper Consultation”. The feat of attaining such civil status was unheard of among artisan officials (Foong 2006, p. 119).

In 1072, Guo Xi completed his great painting, Early Spring (Zaichun tu 早春圖) (Figure 1). Several years after he painted the work, the artist’s instructions appeared in

a pedagogical text, the *Linquan gaozhi* 林泉高致 (Lofty Record of Forests and Streams). The instructions detailed the artistic methods Guo Xi believed necessary in the production of landscape paintings. As mentioned, it was Guo Xi's son, Guo Si, who compiled and edited the manual of his father's sayings. Guo Si also wrote his own *Huaji* 畫記, or "Notes on Guo Xi's Paintings".

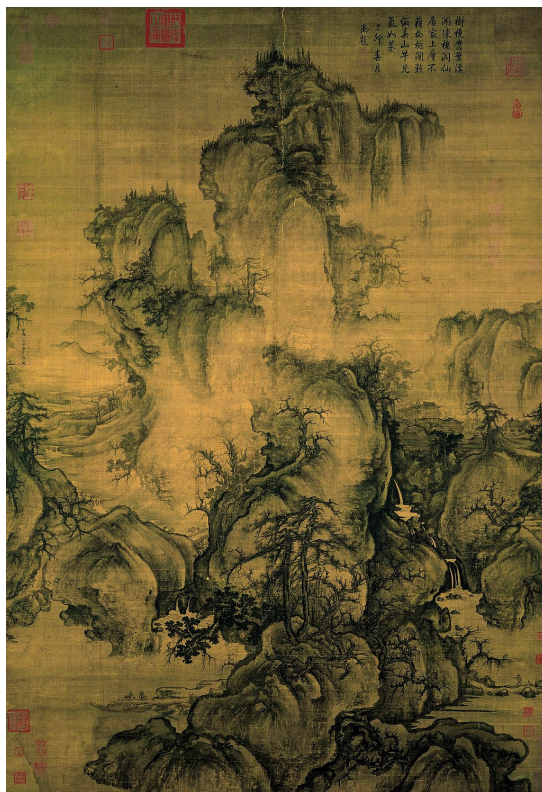


Figure 1. Guo Xi 郭熙 (c. 1020–1090), *Early Spring* 早春圖 (1072), National Palace Museum, Taipei. Image in the Public Domain, Wikipedia, uploaded 19 December 2011.

Instructing artists to paint the mountain anthropomorphically as if it were the human body of the emperor himself, Guo Xi's *Linquan gaozhi* maps out some of the most influential instructional rules for Northern Song monumental landscape painting. In the artist's most well-known painting, *Early Spring*, which is extant and is today part of the National Palace Museum's collection in Taipei, the forms of mountain and human coalesce, emerging on Guo Xi's scroll in the all-powerful form of the emperor. In his instructions, Guo anthropomorphizes the mountain:

Watercourses are the arteries of a mountain; grass and trees its hair; mist and haze its complexion. Therefore, with water a mountain becomes alive; with grass and trees beautiful; with mist and haze charming and elegant. Water has the mountains as its face; arbors and terraces as its eyes and eyebrows; fishing and angling give it animation. Therefore, with mountains, water becomes charming; with arbors and terraces bright and pleasing; fishing and angling give it animation. (Guo Xi, trans. Sakanishi 1935, p. 45)

The artist envisions the mountain's face, and elsewhere he describes the body parts and bones of the mountain. In the *Lofty Record of Forests and Streams*, for example, the mountain is also described as having shoulders, thighs, and a neck, all of which are grounded in their bones, which are the stones foundational to the mountain's structure. Similarly, water is described as the blood of the mountain, which circulates and congeals across the land mass (see [Guo Xi 1935](#), p. 47).

However, Guo Xi does not envision the mountain as a generic human body. In the Comments on Landscape (Shanshui xun 山水訓) section of the Lofty Record, Guo Xi's instructions describe the mountain as having a particular type of body in painting, and that is the body of the emperor. Guo Xi discusses how the mountain is like a majestic emperor, emphasizing how the natural formation of the mountain should be placed as a master of everything that it encompasses—hills, slopes, forests, valleys, etc.

In Guo Si's Huajue 畫訣 section ("Rules for Painting") of the Linquan gaozhi, an emphasis on the hierarchical relationship between the emperor and his people is further highlighted. Guo Xi believed that artists should visualize this relationship when representing the mountain artistically in landscape painting. The master peak of the land, he states, "should be that of an emperor to his subjects, a master to his servants". And, turning to the features of the mountain, Guo Xi also believes that features such as the mountain's trees should be painted as representative of the features of human society, comparing a pine tree to a prince, both leaders in their own domains (natural and human). The mountain's multiple traits are comparable to the emperor's people (Guo Xi 1935, pp. 37, 53–54).

Elsewhere in his writing, Guo Si records his father as delighting in the pleasure that representation of nature may bring to the artist, although he returns to the theme of how an artist's duty is to the civic realm and to provide services to the state (Guo Xi 1935, p. 30).

Guo Xi used representation as a means of fusing symbolically through painting the powerful or majestic aspects of nature with human, imperial powers. In his categorization of natural objects such as mountains, pines, grass, etc., Guo Xi treats nature in a hierarchical manner that parallels the hierarchy of human society. Pine trees are superior to grass, asserts Guo, in the same manner that princes are superior to commoners. The power of the painted mountains described by Guo Xi manifests not in how the paintings represent a quality innate to the natural landscape of the mountain. Rather, this power is perceived when the mountain becomes attached through representation to the human figure of the emperor.

Recruited as a court painter in 1068, Guo Xi worked in the court for at least most of the duration of Emperor Shenzong's reign (1067–1085). Art historians such as Ping Foong have suggested that Guo Xi very likely painted *Early Spring* as a response to reforms that took place following Shenzong's 1068 performance at Round Altar (Yuanqui 圓丘), located on the periphery of the capital's southern edge, of the Southern Suburb sacrifice (Nanjiao jisi 南郊祭祀) (Foong 2006, pp. 68–69). This sacrifice was the most important state ritual of the Northern Song whereby the emperor performed the feng-shan 封禪 sacrifices, or sacrifices to Heaven and Earth. Through the ritual, the emperor maintained his imperial authority and ancestral connections. Following the Southern Sacrifice of 1068, Shen Gua 沈括 (1031–1095) and Shenzong's Grand Councilor, Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021–1086), both important political figures and powerful reformers of the Song period, criticized celebrations surrounding the ritual. They saw these celebrations as extravagant and not in line with the spirit of reform of Shenzong's reign, best articulated through Wang Anshi's New Policies, which, in 1069, were first instituted although they did not reach their final form until 1083 (Foong 2006, pp. 57, 69).

The Southern Suburb sacrifice took place on a triennial basis, and so following the political criticism that had occurred after the performance of the 1068 ritual, celebratory details of the performance of the 1071 ritual were drastically reduced to the point that the emperor was not even required to preside over the event. And it was in the wake of these criticisms and subsequent reforms that Guo Xi presented *Early Spring* to the emperor in the spring that followed the ritual performance of 1071. Indeed, the painting may have served culturally as a symbolic representation of both the emperor's power and the success of Wang Anshi's New Policies.

China's imperial interest in the social functioning of mountain space had typically revolved around the state's emphasis on endorsing the mountain as a symbol of the emperor and the emperor's ritual place, as well as in transforming the religious into the educational. This bridge between mountain space and imperial space is often associated

with state-endorsed rituals connected to Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism (See [Walton 1999](#), pp. 92–93).

Imperial reverence for mountains in China was also not historically bound to an understanding of the mountain as sacred in itself. Rather, the emperor's activities on the mountain were that which made the place important. Similarly, descriptions of the mountain in Guo Si's writings show how his father Guo Xi revered the mountain not as a sacred place in itself, but as a natural formation that becomes special in how it represents the body of the emperor, its features representative of a hierarchy associated with the emperor's domain. Guo Xi's description of the mountain as anthropomorphically connected to the emperor's body creates a fusion, both ideological and artistic, between the power of humans and especially their leaders—a power often associated with Confucian and Neo-Confucian ideologies in China—and the power of the mountain. Emerging from the painting is a relationship between human power and the power of the natural world.

Later, during China's Southern Song period (1127–1279 CE), Neo-Confucian academy-temple building similarly played an important part in the creation of a physical mountain space in which the human body, nature, and Neo-Confucian ideology fuse. The construction of Neo-Confucian temple complexes increased and flourished on various sacred mountains during China's Southern Song period. Interacting with different schools of religion, Neo-Confucians built their individual architectures in mountain locations across the empire, often appropriating geography that other competing Daoist and Buddhist groups had previously deemed as sacred to their own practices. The phenomenon of appropriating sacred space in this manner is perhaps most evident in the flourishing academy movement endorsed by the Neo-Confucian scholar, Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1230 CE), who built academies on mountains formerly associated with spaces considered sacred only within contexts of Buddhism and Daoism. This is not to say that Zhu Xi's intentions were of a non-religious nature. However, a Neo-Confucian envisioning of a sacred space in which human power or control merges with the natural world is present in the academy movement.

2.2. Representations of Internal Alchemy in Song Daoism: Envisioning the Body as Vessel of World and Cosmos

Turning to Daoism, China's Song period also marked a time during which Daoists developed a visual tool that could represent both the internal processes of human bodies, as well as the relationship of these bodies and processes to the external world. This visual tool came in the form of a map or chart (tu 圖) of the body. Such representations offered their viewers the visualization of a system of microcosmic and macrocosmic correspondences at work between the body and the world. In these map images or body charts, Daoists depicted the human body as a microcosm that contained inner landscapes of both natural and cosmic dimensions. Unlike literati writers or imperial artists such as Guo Xi, these Daoists did not represent natural world objects, such as mountains or landscapes, as human symbols. Instead, they represented human bodies as regulated by complex systems of internal processes that also resonated with mountains and the natural world.

Contemporary French scholar Catherine Despeux has extensively researched the histories of these Chinese representations of the body. Examining the representations as they occurred historically in China between the Song and Qing (1644–1911 CE) periods, she has divided them into three categories: those that represent the whole body, the inside of the body (including its organs and skeleton), and that which she calls the “symbolic body”, within which various transformative processes are contained ([Despeux 2005](#), pp. 38–47). Often created within the contexts of medicine and dissection, representations found in the first two of Despeux's categories tend towards the anatomical in their depictions of the human body. The material in the third of these categories, however, which is devoted to body charts created within the context of Chinese Daoism, eschews realism and instead depicts the body in symbolic fashion. Despeux suggests that these symbolic body charts were most likely created as maps, guiding practitioners in their understanding of the hu-

man body's internal sacred spaces (Despeux 2005, p. 47). If this is the case, then the images of the body charts should be read or interpreted, just as one would read text or words. The charts and images that Despeux examines are fused with Chinese characters; thus, word and image intertwine, and understanding of the charts' meanings hinges upon readings of both forms of communication.

These body charts, prototypes for later ones that are still used in Daoism today, are representations of internal alchemy (neidan 內). The relationship between the rise of internal alchemy and the creation of these charts during the Song period is relevant. Based on the historical knowledge we have of these charts, my theory is that just as Daoism was entering a phase of internalization in the form of internal alchemy, externalization in the form of alchemical representation was also rising as the material means through which a Daoist religious experience could be actualized.

The Baiyun guan 白雲觀 (White Cloud Abbey), one of Beijing's most important sites of Chinese Daoism today, holds among its collection two of the most well-known body charts in China. Found in the form of two nineteenth-century stone steles, both charts depict sacred alchemical maps of the human body. These steles are the Neijing tu 內經圖 (Chart of Inner Landscape) (Figure 2), originally erected at Baiyun guan in 1886, and the Xiuzhen tu 修真圖 (Chart for the Cultivation of Perfection) (Figure 3), placed at the temple in 1890. Created during China's Qing period, both charts vividly amalgamate the human body with the forms of mountain and landscape, acting even today as important records of how representation and visualization have interacted in Daoism.

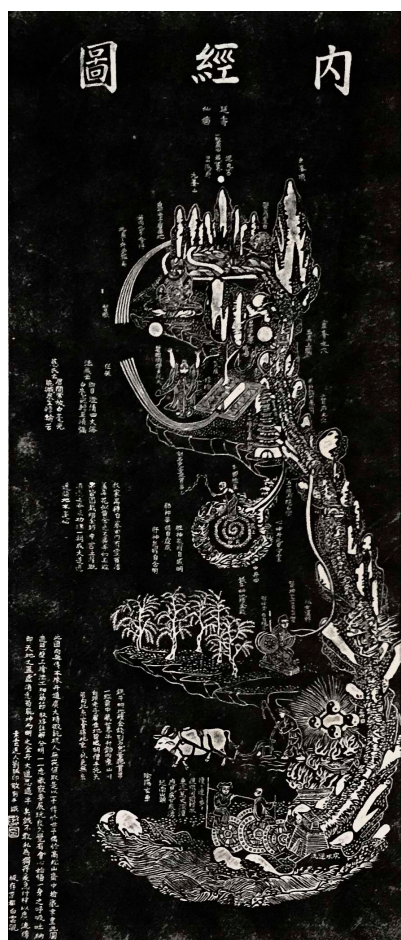


Figure 2. Neijing tu 內經圖 Chart of Inner Landscape, Erected at Baiyunguan 白雲觀 in 1886. Photograph, Copyright 2017, Antoni Batchelli. All rights reserved.

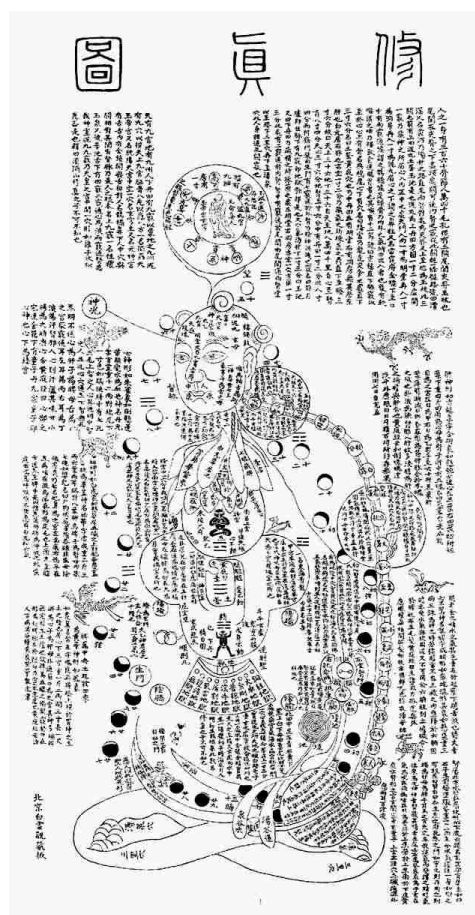


Figure 3. Xiu zhen tu 修真圖 Chart for the Cultivation of Perfection, Erected at Baiyunguan in 1890. Image copyright 2010, Fabrizio Pregadio and the Golden Elixir website. All rights reserved.

In the case of the Neijing tu, the head of the body in the work is representative of Mount Kunlun, China's mythical sacred mountain which is described in ancient writings of the Shanhaijing (山海經). The body is divided into various elixir fields and characterized by resident deities (Wang 1992, p. 150; Komjathy 2009, pp. 64–108). The Neijing tu, which was engraved and placed within the Baiyunguan, could have been used for purposes of instructing Quanzhen adherents as to how they might envision their own internal landscapes. Contemporary scholars such as Susan Huang have conducted compelling research to explain and interpret the meanings of the images (e.g., see Huang 2012).

Created during the Qing period but within the context of Quanzhen Daoism originally developed during the Song period, the Neijing tu and the Xiu zhen tu are perhaps the most well-known Daoist alchemical body charts to this day. However, there are also important examples of these types of representations found in other forms of Daoism. And, in fact, visualization practices in Quanzhen find historical precedents in Shangqing 上清 (Supreme Clarity) Daoism (Komjathy 2009, pp. 64–108). The Map of Rise and Fall of Yin and Yang in the Human Body Tixiang yinyang shengjiang tu 體象陰陽升降圖 (Figure 4), an important Song period Daoist body chart, for example, was formed within the context of Shangqing Daoism. This fact is important, demonstrating that it was not so much the development of a new school of Daoism, namely Quanzhen, that influenced the use of these body charts. Rather, a more general aspect of Daoism—that of internal alchemy—appears to have been more influential.



Figure 4. Map of Rise and Fall of Yin and Yang in the Human Body tixiang yinyang shengjiang tu 體象陰陽升降圖 (ca. 1226) presented to Emperor Lizong by Xiao Yingsou (Ming Zhengtong Daozang 90). Photograph from the Daoist Canon, Anna M. Hennessey, copyright 2010.

Although many Song Daoists moved away from external alchemy, internalizing the alchemical process instead, they also embraced physical representations of the internal process as found in body charts. Utilizing the terminology of external alchemy, Song Daoists, including those of Quanzhen Daoism (a form of Daoism especially characterized by its meditative elements and focus on internal alchemy) embraced body charts as a tool, ultimately developing elaborate imagery.

As found in the later Qing charts of the Neijing tu and Xiuzhen tu discussed earlier, these representations depicted landscapes as microcosmically contained within the human body. Expressing mental visualizations in the form of physical representations, such charts thus acted in part to make the internal an external phenomenon once again. And the development of Chinese alchemical representations that depicted the human body in the form of mountains or natural landscapes appears to have correlated with the rise of internal alchemy in Daoism (See also: [Hennessey 2022](#), pp. 263–71).

As internalization became intimately bound with Daoism, externalization in the form of mountain-body representations rose as a way through which the process of internalization could be expressed and utilized. In this manner, the Daoist charts were pivotal and not accessory to the ideological developments taking place in Daoism.

2.3. Expressions of Buddhism in Southern Song Art: Mountain–Body Fusions in the Paintings of Liang Kai 梁楷

Lastly, this paper examines Chinese Buddhist art, focusing on a new style of painting that emerged towards the end of the Southern Song period when an amalgamation between the human body and the natural world occurred in the realm of art. As popularity of the Northern Song monumental landscape movement waned, court artists focused once again on the human figure, which became integral to many compositions of Southern Song painting. As opposed to the mountains and natural landscapes of Northern Song monumental landscape painting that had engulfed the human body, minimizing individuals or

hiding them within the work, landscapes in Southern Song art often acted as natural world backgrounds that emphasized the figures of human beings.

Of specific interest to this paper is how the theme of landscape as figure morphed in two ways in the artwork of Liang Kai 梁楷 (ca. 1200 CE), a reclusive painter who at the beginning of the thirteenth century departed from his decorated post as court artist for the Southern Song Imperial Painting Academy (Nan Song hua yuan 南宋畫院 Record on Academy Paintings of the Southern Song) to paint at Chan Buddhist monasteries in and around the Southern Song capital of Hangzhou 杭州.

The earliest biographical information making any reference to Liang Kai occurs within the preface of the *Huaji Buyi* 畫繼補遺, written by Zhuang Su 莊肅, a Junior Scribe in the Imperial Library of the Southern Song period (Zhuang Su [1298] 1963; Rogers 1983, pp. 16–33; Zhou Mi 2002, p. 135). Dated to 1298, Zhuang's biographical information on Liang Kai is wanting. But he pays particular attention to recording a description of the special liberty found in Liang's way of using the brush:

Liang Kai, the top pupil of Jia Shigu 賈師古, was also attached to the Painting Academy. The line of his drawing was gracefully free and he surpassed his teacher like blue surpasses indigo. People of that time for the most part appreciated him. (Rogers 1983, p. 27)

Zhuang imparts the idea that even when Liang was part of the Southern Song Painting Academy tradition, the artist's manner of painting was of an untrammelled, free nature.

The *Tuhui Baojian* 圖繪寶鑑 Precious Mirror of Painting, an important Yuan period compendia listing biographies of painters, written in 1365 by the art historian, Xia Wenyan 夏文彥 (14th century), is probably the clearest historical document to make note of chronological details related to Liang Kai's life (Xia [1365] 1959, p. 102; Tanaka 1957, p. i; Loehr 1980, p. 215). Listed in the *Tuhui Baojian* as a painter of various subjects, including figures, landscapes, Daoist and Buddhist images, as well as unusual, or supernatural beings, Liang was appointed *daizhao* 待詔, or painter-in-attendance, from 1201 to 1204 during Emperor Ningzong's 寧宗 (1168–1224) reign in the Southern Song (Loehr 1980, p. 215). Later, during the Qing period (1644–1911), Liang also appears in the writings of Li E 厲鶚 (1692–1752), a poet and leader of an important school of poetry during the Qing known as the *Zhexi ci* School 浙西詞派 (Li E 1964, (17th c. CE), p. 166; Nelson 2001, p. 31m20).

In Li E's *Nan Song yuan hua lu* 南宋院畫錄, Liang Kai is described as having lived and worked in and around the Southern Song capital of Hangzhou. Liang received special honor from the academy in 1204 when he was awarded the Golden Belt (*jindai* 金帶), a prize essentially considered an imperial decoration (Nelson 2001, p. 31n20). However, also according to the *Nan Song yuan hua lu*, Liang allegedly abandoned the award hanging in the Academy, abruptly ceasing his work for the court, and retreating thereafter to various Chan temples in the vicinity of Hangzhou (Loehr 1980, p. 215; Watson 2000; Fontein and Hickman 1970, p. 35).

Liang was not a Chan monk himself. However, the untrammelled brush style of his later works eventually found special reverence within Chan circles, and subsequently within the Chan/Zen circles of Japan, the destination for many of Liang's extant works. Japanese Zen monks transported them from China, primarily during the Yoshino and Muromachi Periods (late fourteenth to the fifteenth centuries). Dachuan Puji 大川普濟 (1179–1253), for example, an important Song monk who in 1252 compiled for the Chan sect a seminal text called the *Wudeng Huiyuan* 五燈會元 (Compendium of Five Lamps), inscribed some of Liang's work while serving as the thirty-seventh abbot of the Lingyin Temple (Tanaka 1957, p. i). Based on the existence of inscriptions by Chan monks on some of Liang's paintings, it is also probable that Liang lived and painted in Chan monasteries in and around Hangzhou, including that of the Lingyin Temple 靈隱寺 in northwest Hangzhou (Yan 2000, p. 201; Ferguson 2000, p. xix). Sprinkled elsewhere, mainly in poetic contexts of the Song and Yuan Dynasties, Liang's name also materializes on occasion.

Strong differences are clear between Liang Kai's early academic style, in which he depicts the human figures in landscape; and his later individualistic style, in which body

and landscape are fused. The second and more drastic of the thematic shifts occurred around the time that Liang renounced his position as a court artist to participate artistically in activities of the monastic world. At this time, the artist began using a broad stroke technique with splashed ink (pomo 潑墨), creating ink images of human figures that are focal to his scrolls, as well as the yipin 逸品, or “untrammeled” style of brushwork in which the artist’s ink flows freely.

In some of these later works, Liang’s figures replace the landscape entirely. Yet just as landscape recedes or disappears in these paintings, the technique that the painter used to depict the human body takes on the same stylistic qualities found previously in landscape paintings. As such, the body itself becomes the landscape. Liang’s use of his ink-wash method, therefore, acts to render human bodies as if they were mountains. Attached to the iconography of Chan Buddhism 禪宗, these figures merge with the natural world by mimicking in ink the images of the mountains, rocks and natural formations themselves. In one painting attributed to Liang, for example, the artist presents an image of the two legendary monk-poets, Hanshan 寒山 and Shi De 拾得, who lived during the ninth century of the Tang Dynasty (618–907). Poetry and imagery surrounding the figures of these monks had become popular in the literary culture attached to Chan Buddhist institutions of the Song period. Liang’s use of an untrammeled brushstroke style to paint figures such as these is representative of an ink-wash technique more commonly associated with the production of landscape than figure painting (Ortiz 1999, pp. 101–4). The bodies of the two painted monks merge like the rocky cliffs of a Chinese mountain landscape.

In his well-known painting, *The Sixth Chan Patriarch Huineng Chopping Bamboo* (Liuzu pizhutu 六祖劈竹圖) (Figure 5), Liang depicts the famous Chan patriarch, Huineng 惠能 in black ink on paper. The painting’s subject matter pertains to the narration of Huineng’s enlightenment, which according to Chan legend occurred upon Huineng’s hearing of the chopping of bamboo (Brinker 1987, p. 103). In this undated painting, Liang’s brushwork is highly abbreviated, with quick strokes forming the crouching profile of Huineng’s body. The patriarch is represented in the act of chopping a single shaft of bamboo, a wiry tree curving away from him towards the left-hand side of the paper.



Figure 5. Liang Kai, *The Sixth Chan Patriarch Huineng Chopping Bamboo* Liuzu pizhutu 六祖劈竹圖 (13th c.). Tokyo National Museum, Image in the Public Domain, Wikipedia, uploaded 26 July 2009.

The cursive style found in Liang's painting of Huineng is not typical of Buddhist art. No ornamentation decorates the patriarch's figure. Therefore, while the subject matter of the painting pertains to the patriarch's sudden enlightenment (*dunwu* 頓悟), Liang's spontaneous brushwork is also sudden, as if to represent through artistic means the theme of the work.

This untrammelled style of depicting Chan themes became more and more popular in China after the Southern Song, and it also dominated Zen art in Japan. Liang's "sudden strokes" were part of a domesticated form of Buddhist art in China. In Liang's undated painting of an anonymous immortal, *Splashed Ink Immortal* (*Pomo xianren tu* 潑墨仙人圖) (Figure 6), the artist completely rejects the academic style of his earlier work in favor of something new.



Figure 6. Liang Kai *Splashed Ink Immortal* *Pomo xianren tu* 潑墨仙人圖 (early 13th c.). National Palace Museum, Taipei, Image in the Public Domain, Wikipedia, uploaded 9 October 2016.

Using the *yipin* (untrammelled) style, Liang avoids the detailed linear strokes found in his earlier work. The technique of this spontaneous brushwork is also referred to as *jianbi* 簡筆, or "diminishing brushwork" (Brinker 1971, p. 126). Taiwanese art historian, Li Lincan has commented that Liang Kai was the pivotal figure in the transformation of painting styles from detailed brushwork to the new style of ink monochrome painting (*shuimo* 水墨), which especially flourished later in the artwork of the Yuan Dynasty masters of painting (1271–1368) following the fall of the Southern Song period (Li Lincan 1990, p. 214).

In Liang's *Immortal*, coarse splashes of ink depict the body of the immortal as a rough form on paper. The entire painting exudes a sense of dynamism, and although the immortal has a human body, the image does not appear figural. Indeed, the broad washes of ink that form the immortal's body bring to mind the image of sheets of rock making up a mountain. And just as rock does not always cleave perfectly or smoothly, comprising instead a multitude of protrusions, flats, holes, bulges and dips when it breaks, so too does Liang's ink create the uneven slabs of the immortal's body. The late Daoist scholar Kristofer Schipper also described the body of Liang's *Immortal* as that of a mountain (Schipper [1982] 1993, p. 108).

Although it would be difficult to confirm with certainty Liang's intentions in the creation of his untrammelled paintings, such as the *Immortal*, it is clear through inscriptions available to us from Chan monks such as Dachuan Puji and Beijian Jujian that Liang was in contact with Chan monks, and that these monks were actively interested in the artist's paintings.

A focus on rushan 入山, or "entering the mountains", is apparent in Chan histories and discourse records. In his work on Dongshan Liangjie 東山良价 (807–869), one of the most prominent Chan teachers of the Tang period (618–907 CE), religious studies scholar William Powell discusses the Chan focus on entering the mountain. As Powell explains, this human penetration into the mountains was on the one hand associated with pilgrimage practices attached to the temples in which Chan masters resided. Yet, according to Powell, rushan does not only refer to the physical act of entering the mountain:

Journeys into the mountains seem to have been more than this. In terse anecdotes of the discourse records, where the context is often left unstated, it is significant that mountain wandering, when it occurs, is mentioned explicitly. Furthermore, mountain wandering is often presented as a separate practice, an end in itself, with no mention of visiting teachers. (Powell 1986, p. 16)

Powell explains that the practice of entering the mountain, prevalent in Chan Buddhism, could be attached to other traditions in China:

But there are certain spiritual traditions in China, such as Maoshan Daoism 茅山道, where the aspirant is believed literally to go inside a mountain in order to undergo spiritual transformation. However one entered the mountains, the implications of the journey invariably seemed to be spiritual. (Powell 1986, p. 16)

Liang Kai's *Immortal* is a man who enters the mountain by merging physically with the landscape via the ink of the artist's brush. If the painting is indeed related to Chan Buddhism, it could be a physical manifestation of rushan.

Considering the drastic shift that Liang's style took once he departed from his position in the court, it is likely that his connections to the monastic community in and around Hangzhou influenced both the subject matter and style of his later paintings. The impact of Liang's painting style had a lasting effect not only in China but also in Japan, and this untrammelled way of painting the human body became an integral part of a domesticated form of Buddhist art in China and Japan.

As discussed earlier in this paper, the merging that took place between ink painting and literati scholarship during the Northern Song period resulted in ink paintings of natural world objects (e.g., the plum blossom) ideologically representative of human character. A reverse form of this anthropomorphism is at work in the art of Liang Kai. The human form of the immortal does not look human, but instead looks like the natural form of a mountain; thus, the figure becomes its own landscape. Liang's fusion of body and landscape differs greatly from the artwork of the Northern Song, exemplified in Guo Xi's monumental landscape painting, *Early Spring*. Unlike Guo Xi's masterpiece, Liang Kai's paintings of bodies do not represent social hierarchy in pictorial fashion.

3. Conclusions

In conclusion, this paper contends that the artworks and other material items examined did not act as representational objects during China's Song period. Rather, they were integral and often pivotal both to cultural developments, be they of a religious, philosophical, or ideological nature, and to the hybridization of religions and world views that took place at that time. In these instances, a material object not only became an active part of the way that a religion was practiced, or an ideology expressed, but also participated on a transformative level within the religion or philosophy. In each case, the religious and ideological transformations described pertained to how human bodies were depicted materially in relation to the natural world. The mental and the physical were synthesized as part of a momentous cultural process, and the interaction between the non-material activ-

ity of visualization and the material output of representation was, therefore, paramount, as opposed to accessory, to the ways that different groups of people experienced and expressed philosophy, art, and religion during the Song.

In each of the cultural traditions explored, the human body and its relationship to the natural world are depicted in vastly different manners. In the imperial context of the Northern Song, the court artist Guo Xi utilized his art as a means through which mountains and nature could be envisioned as man and society. Through his mountain-body fusions in painting, Guo Xi expressed political ideology that powerfully benefited the imperial state and policies connected to Confucianism. In the meantime, Daoists developed a visual tool fusing human body and natural world, such that they could represent the internal processes of human bodies as intimately connected to processes of the external world, nature, and cosmos. And, in Liang Kai's paintings associated with Chan Buddhist art, we see how through representation, the human body metamorphosizes into elements of the natural world in the form of art.

Finally, the research of the paper has demonstrated how material representations played an active role in perceptions of sacred space during Song China. Through art and representation, the Chinese of this time visualized space as both microcosmically and macrocosmically connected to the human body. And while individuals of some religious groups were in the process of exploring a mountain-body connection within the sphere of Song art and representation, proponents of different schools of thought were also actively discovering, assimilating and appropriating sacred space.

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