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Dao, Neo-Confucian Principle, and Chan Buddhism in
Chinese Calligraphy and Painting

Wen Xing

苑出版社
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道、理、禪与中国书画

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献给父母

邢后望 (1935 -) ——原金陵老年大学书法系、国画系主任

王晓云 (1934 -) ——原南京市成贤街小学附属幼儿园主任

To my parents

Xing Houwang (1935-), former Chair of both the Chinese Calligraphy
and Chinese Painting Departments at Nanjing U3A

Wang Xiaoyun (1934-), former Director of the Kindergarten Affiliated
to Nanjing Chengxianjie Primary School

Chronology

2070-1600 B.C.E.	Xia 夏 Dynasty
1600-1046 B.C.E.	Shang 商 Dynasty
1046-256 B.C.E.	Zhou 周 Dynasties
221-206 B.C.E.	Qin 秦 Dynasty
206 B.C.E.-220 C.E.	Han 汉 Dynasties
265-420	Jin 晋 Dynasties
420-589	Southern and Northern Dynasties
581-618	Sui 隋 Dynasty
618-907	Tang 唐 Dynasty
907-960	Five Dynasties
907-1125	Liao 辽 Dynasty
960-1279	Song 宋 Dynasties
1206-1368	Yuan 元 Dynasty
1368-1644	Ming 明 Dynasty
1616-1911	Qing 清 Dynasty
1912-1949	Republic of China 中华民国
1949-	People's Republic of China 中华人民共和国

Preface and Acknowledgements

Dao, or Tao (in the outmoded Wade-Giles Romanization system), often translated as the Way of the universe, has been the name of one of the most important philosophical and religious traditions in China for about two millennia. Daoism, though named after Dao, does not have exclusive use of the idea of Dao. In fact, all of the “Three Teachings” in China (Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism) have paid particular attention to Dao. The Dao of Heaven, or the Heavenly Way, has been a core concept in both Confucianism and Daoism. Emptiness, a central teaching of Buddhism, is a reference to “the way” of existence itself, as well as everything in it. Traditional Chinese calligraphy and painting have developed in the context of Dao, and have been deeply defined and influenced by it. It is because of this deep connection between art and Dao in China that I argue traditional Chinese art is in fact a type of cosmology.¹

The eight chapters of this book, *Dao, Neo-Confucian Principle, and Chan Buddhism in Chinese Calligraphy and Painting*, are presented in chronological order and begin with the Neolithic period and the earliest historical dynasties and end with the most recent imperial dynasties in China. Although these chapters are based on my overseas publications and presentations on Chinese art over the past

1 Xing Wen, *Chinese Art as a Cosmology*, 12 chapters (in Chinese), *Ethnic Arts Quarterly* 2011.1, 22-29; 2011.2, 22-30, 41; 2011.3, 24-31, 45; 2011.4, 26-34; 2012.1, 29-34; 2012.2, 13-17; 2012.3, 15-20; 2012.4, 18-26; 2013.1, 19-25, 84; 2013.2, 16-21; 2013.3, 15-22; and 2013.4, 5-10. See also “Chinese Calligraphy as a Cosmology,” in Xing Wen, *“Hiding the Tip”: Gateway to Chinese Calligraphy* (Portland: MerwinAsia, 2013), 1-9.

two decades, they have been carefully selected and largely revised in order to form a coherent and independent academic book.

Chapter One, “Dao Throughout Time,” argues that prehistoric art forms, whether they were visual, performing, shamanistic, or medicinal, etc., were all experiences and realizations of the universe by prehistoric people, and that all of those prehistoric art forms were part of or at least a reflection of Dao. However, prehistoric Chinese people were not necessarily aware that they were experiencing Dao. The “founder of Daoism,” Laozi, explained this well when he said, “As for the nature of the Way—it’s shapeless and formless 道之为物，唯恍唯忽.”¹ On the other hand, the Confucian tradition has never doubted that Dao was always present—as reflected in what the sage Confucius said, “The Way is not far from man 道不远人.”²

Chapter Two, “Graphical Paradigms of the Cosmos,” examines the graphical expressions of Dao in early Chinese silk and bamboo-slip manuscripts. I argue that graphical layouts in excavated early Chinese manuscripts depict the paradigms of the universe. Therefore, pre-Daoist cosmological manuscripts (such as Figure 2.4) and Confucian texts such as the classics of the *Changes* (Figure 2.23) and of the *Rites* (Figure 3.9) are all attempts to illustrate Dao. This understanding of the universe was one of the critical theories upon which Neo-Confucian scholars later developed the idea of Neo-Confucian Principle. With more and more early silk and bamboo-slip manuscripts now being discovered, I believe and argue that the excavated bamboo and silk manuscripts and the Chinese Manuscript Culture have become integral to the study of Chinese calligraphy and painting.

Chapter Three, “Between Heaven and Human Beings,” focuses on the relationship between heaven and human beings in the universe within or possibly beyond the established graphical paradigms. From two perspectives, I propose theories explaining the position, seasonality, and mutual interactions of the Five Colors in ancient China. I conduct a comprehensive survey of the pottery, jade, bronze, and silk art of the human-animal motif from pre-historic to early historic periods in the context of early Chinese cosmology and religions; and for the first time, I propose

1 Robert G. Henricks, *Lao-tzu Te-tao Ching: A New Translation Based on the Recently Discovered Ma-wang-tui Texts* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989), 228-229.

2 Adapted from Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), 95-115. Both Robert G. Henricks and Wing-Tsit Chan are professors emeritus at Dartmouth College.

a systematic categorization of ancient Chinese human-animal art, which depicts an additional, and usually neglected dimension of the universe.

Chapter Four, “The Cosmos of the Tombs,” further explores the unique dimension that featured mysterious animals and spirits, as well as human beings in the second century B.C.E. tomb art excavated from Mawangdui, Changsha, China. I explain the metaphysical world depicted in the lacquer paintings on the coffins and the two T-shaped silk paintings found at Mawangdui, and I describe them as a local religion that was somewhat similar to Daoism yet was still contained within Confucian cosmological and ritual systems.

Chapter Five, “Cosmological Observations,” enters the historic period when Neo-Daoism and Buddhism flourished. In addition to the political turbulence and the consequent uncertainty of life which was prevalent at the time, the similarity between the Daoist concept of “Nothingness” and the Buddhist concept of “Emptiness” greatly contributed to the intellectual and religious features of Neo-Daoism and the development of Buddhism in China. The literati’s cosmological observations were well documented in the Chinese manuscript culture, and in particular, in calligraphic and painting masterpieces. As I argue, one masterpiece that was long believed to be the *Scroll of the Orchid Pavilion* by Wen Zhengming (1470-1559; Figure 8.4) was actually the *Scroll of the Flowing Goblets*. Also, both the text and the calligraphy of the most famous calligraphic masterpiece, the *Preface to the Orchid Pavilion*, was likely forged by Emperor Taizong (598-649) of the Tang Dynasty.

Chapter Six, “Calligraphy and Painting Share the Same ‘Principle,’” is the first study of Neo-Confucian paintings, i.e., Lixue hua 理学画, and focuses on analysis of “Principle.” “Principle,” according to Neo-Confucianism, is the expression of Dao in the universe which can be found in all things. Shared by Neo-Daoism as one of the “Three Classics of the Profundity,” the *Book of Changes* provided Neo-Confucianism with one of the fundamental sources of accessing this “Principle.” Drawing from his unique understanding of the *Book of Changes* and from the perspective of Neo-Confucian Principle, Master Zhuang’s (1437-1499) Neo-Confucian paintings, together with his Neo-Confucian poems, not only influenced the founders of the most important painting school in the Ming Dynasty, the Wumen School, but also made it possible for us to start a new field of study in Chinese art history, the Neo-Confucian Painting.

Chapter Seven, “Chan Buddhism and Chan Buddhism in Painting,” pays particular attention to the Chan Buddhist concept of time and space that was illustrated within and between the brushstrokes of Chinese calligraphy and painting. Although the distinction between Chan Buddhist sitting meditation and Chan Buddhist enlightenment meditation is examined, I do not go further to scrutinize the close relationship and interactions between Neo-Daoism, Chan Buddhism, and Neo-Confucianism from the perspective of Dao. I argue that although Chan Buddhist brushwork came from traditional Chinese calligraphy and painting, it surpassed the confines of traditional Chinese calligraphy and painting, and that Chan Buddhist painting also transcended the traditional concepts of time and space in Chinese painting. I also argue and explain why Master Dandang (1593-1673), a Ming loyalist, Chan Buddhist, poet, calligrapher, and painter, made the most important contributions to the application of Chan Buddhism to traditional Chinese calligraphy and painting of any painter in history (Figures 11.5 to 11.7).

Chapter Eight, “Conveying Dao with Brushwork,” surveys traditional Chinese “Mountains-and-Waters” paintings in both the Ming and the Qing dynasties from the 14th to the 19th centuries in order to echo and complete the themes of Chapter One, “Dao Throughout Time.” This is a natural comparison since traditional Chinese landscape paintings have long been used as a way to reflect on Dao and the eternity of the universe. I further argue that this type of reflection and visual expression is not limited to traditional Chinese landscape paintings since contemporary paintings with “*taiji* awareness,” such as the award-winning painting by the child artist Tian Xing (Figure 12.5), can also convey the Dao of the universal *taiji* “Supreme Ultimate.” In this last chapter, I reveal my discovery of a long-lost 17th century painting school in Southwest China’s Yunnan Province, the Dandang School of Painting, and also describe and explain the stylistic comprehensive tendency in traditional Chinese Mountains-and-Waters painting during this period.

As mentioned earlier, all these arguments and theories were either published or presented at universities or institutions outside of China before being included in this book. It has been such a joy to recall and thank the many people whose generosity and friendship have made those presentations possible. Chapter Two is a Chinese translation of my two papers in English, which were largely based on my presentation at the Faculty Research Dinners at Trinity University in December, 2004. I would like to thank Dr. Diane Smith and Dr. Fred Loxsom

for kindly making that possible, and I would also like to thank the Research Dinners participants, whose names are listed in the first footnote of the chapter, for their insightful comments. Special thanks goes to Dr. Nina C. Ekstein and Dr. Sarah P. Burke, two of the most senior professors at Trinity, for their integrity and invaluable support during my years at Trinity. Chapters Three and Four are based on my presentations at “The Social and Cultural Dynamics Research Group Special Seminar” at University College London in March, 1999. I would like to express my deep gratitude to Dr. Jeremy Tanner, Professor of Classical and Comparative Art in the Institute of Archaeology at University College London, for his kind invitation and generous arrangements. Chapter Five is based on the presentations in my advanced seminar at Dartmouth College, “Chinese Calligraphy and Manuscript Culture: *Orchid Pavilion*,” in the fall of 2013. I thank the seminar participants, Alexandra L. Barg, Gavin Huang, Seung Wook Kim, Mui Ling Lam, Young Sang Ryu, Rachael E. Siegel, Shaozhong Wang, Deborah J. Yeoh-Wang, Bin Na Yoon, Richard Yu, Xiongfei Zhang, and Zinan Zhao, for their enthusiasm and contributions. Special recognition goes to Wang Shaozhong, who presented the second half of Chapter Eight in English. This advanced seminar was accompanied by an international exhibition of “Chinese Calligraphy and Manuscript Art” generously supported by the Office of the President and the Office of the Provost as part of Dartmouth’s Year of the Arts initiative in collaboration with the Dean of the Faculty. Co-sponsors of the exhibition include the Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Languages and Literatures, the Asian and Middle Eastern Studies Program, the Leslie Center for the Humanities, the Hood Museum of Art, the Education and Outreach Program of Dartmouth College Library, and the Studio Art Department. I thank Dr. Hua-yuan L. Mowry for her generous loan of calligraphy masterpieces from her private collection. I am especially grateful to Dennis P. Grady for his talented designs, Laura Barrett for her prompt help, and Nien Lin Xie for her constant support. Chapter Seven is based on a public lecture delivered in Chinese at Mount Holyoke College in February, 2010. My tremendous gratitude goes to Dr. Jonathan Lipman, Felicia Gressitt Bock Professor of Asian Studies and Professor of History at Mount Holyoke, for the insightful and considerate arrangements he made for me and for the many Chinese speaking students who were at Mount Holyoke.

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Following the tradition of Chinese publications to place acknowledgements in a postscript, I will acknowledge the Chinese names in the Postscript of this volume.

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