

Visual Expression of Yin-Yang and Bagua Philosophy in Song Dynasty Landscape Painting

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ABSTRACT

The Book of Changes is one of the ancient Chinese philosophical classics, which expounds the theory of Yin-Yang and Bagua (Eight diagram). This study aims to study the philosophical implications of Yin-Yang and Bagua in the Book of Changes and its artistic expression in Chinese landscape painting. This study uses observation and semiotic methods to reveal the symbolic imagery of Yin-Yang and Bagua in landscape painting and its profound influence on artistic creation. The study found that the philosophical concept of Yin-Yang and Bagua is deeply reflected in Chinese landscape painting, providing a unique symbol system for artistic creation and expanding the understanding of landscape painting. This study could provide a new perspective for the mutual penetration of Chinese traditional culture and art.

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Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to existing literature by systematically analyzing the manifestation of yin-yang and Bagua philosophy in Song Dynasty landscape paintings through quantitative methods, filling gaps in previous research on the philosophical foundations of traditional Chinese artistic expression.

1. Introduction

The I Ching, also known as the Book of Changes, is one of the most fundamental philosophical texts in ancient China, dating back approximately 3,000 years (Olshin, 2005). At its core, it expounds a cosmological framework centered on the concepts of yin and yang and the Bagua (Eight diagram), which have fundamentally influenced Chinese thought, culture, and artistic expression throughout history (Matthews, 2021). These philosophical ideas are reflected in many aspects of Chinese cultural practice, especially in landscape painting.

Chinese landscape painting is any picture depicting natural scenery, including mountains, rivers, trees, and atmospheric elements, painted on silk, paper, wall, or other permanent surfaces (Liu, 2021; Tan, 2016). These paintings are often created to represent the harmonious relationship between humans and nature or to convey a deeper philosophical meaning to the audience (Jiao, 2025). At the same time, as a visual carrier of philosophical ideas, landscape painting has become a mature art form in Chinese tradition, which conveys cosmological philosophical concepts through visual language on surfaces such as scrolls or albums (Yang, 2023). The resulting works have been widely recognized for their ability to embody philosophical concepts and representations of natural landscapes, and are generally considered to be valuable cultural heritage that provides insights into the traditional Chinese worldview (Ma & Zakaria, 2024; Xing et al., 2023).

Research has found that the influence of the Yin-Yang Bagua principle is reflected in landscape paintings from multiple historical periods (Yang, 2023; Fan, 2025). Rani et al. (2020) pointed out that landscape paintings from the Song Dynasty (960-1279 AD) expressed visual elements of the cosmological philosophical concepts in the Book of Changes. Similarly, landscape paintings from the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368 AD) and the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 AD) are symbolic paintings of the natural world to promote a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between humans and nature (McMahon, 2003). In addition, traditional Chinese landscape paintings are works that often convey philosophical messages through visual images, making specific and abstract concepts understandable and aesthetically appealing (Turner, 2009; Yang et al., 2025). Therefore, some critics generally believe that these philosophical elements in paintings are not enough to be regarded as decorative features, but should be regarded as visual expressions of Chinese thought (Wang & Wang, 2025; Law, 2011; Ma & Zakaria, 2024), because Chinese landscape painting is a philosophical text in visual form and a cultural treasure house of traditional wisdom (Fan et al., 2025; Duan, 2019).

Therefore, this study aims to explore the symbolic expression of the Yin-Yang Bagua principle in Chinese landscape painting, analyze how these concepts are reflected through visualization, and reveal the core cultural significance of landscape painting as a philosophical thought. This study could deepen our understanding of traditional Chinese art, and also provide a new perspective for exploring the relationship between philosophical thought and visual art.

2. Literature Review

Some research show that the Yin-Yang and Bagua principle plays an increasingly important role in Chinese philosophy and art. The concept of Yin-Yang has a positive and significant impact on the composition structure and aesthetic integrity of Chinese landscape painting (Yang, 2023). However, Wang (2024) pointed out that there are also some challenges in the traditional Chinese cultural expression, and effective strategies are needed to construct relevant symbol systems (Xiong, 2024; Hu et al., 2021). Specifically, these challenges mainly stem from the differences in the translation of traditional philosophical concepts and visual expressions. Semiotic interpretation methods could help people better understand philosophical ideas in works of art, but they encounter difficulties when they are transformed into a comprehensive interpretation system. This transformation may lead to a gap in understanding and weaken people's understanding of the deeper cultural meaning of the works. In this context, semiotic interpretation methods, as an important way to understand visual

expression, could not only enhance the in-depth understanding of Chinese culture, but also enhance the dissemination of philosophical ideas (Hu, 2020).

In addition, the effectiveness of the philosophical interpretation system depends largely on the audience's understanding and perception of the Yin-Yang principle (Abbas, 2024). Ma and Zakaria (2024) emphasized that the translation relationship between visual symbols and philosophical concepts has a decisive influence on understanding the deep meaning of traditional Chinese landscape painting. Khwaja (2024) further pointed out that as the academic community's understanding of the philosophical foundation continues to deepen, a more sophisticated interpretation system needs to be constructed to reveal the intrinsic connection between philosophical ideas and the visual expression of works. Because landscape paintings usually convey complex philosophical connotations through multi-level visual symbols. When interdisciplinary dialogue is insufficient, the interpretive connection between abstract philosophical ideas and specific visual expressions is difficult to establish. More importantly, determining the philosophical meaning expressed by the visual elements in the painting requires rigorous verification, especially when the same visual element may express different philosophical meanings in different contexts (Lin & Zhang, 2024).

The visual expression of Yin-Yang and Bagua philosophy in Chinese landscape painting has become an important topic in art history research and cross-cultural communication. This issue involves many aspects: differences in theoretical frameworks, limitations of research methods, differences in audience understanding, and the complexity of Chinese philosophy itself. The core difficulty lies in how to transform abstract philosophical concepts into visual symbols and accurately convey the philosophical implications of the original work through these visual expressions, focusing on the consistency between philosophical thoughts and visual expressions, so that the audience can not only feel the aesthetic value but also understand the philosophical connotation when appreciating landscape paintings, thereby gaining a more comprehensive understanding of these works of art.

3. Research Methods

This study is a qualitative study; qualitative research refers to the meaning, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols and descriptions of things (Nemani, 2009). People tend to use images and descriptions to evaluate research objects and give events or things a certain meaning. This study uses observational methods to analyze images and combines semiotic methods to analyze the philosophical meaning of Yin Yang Bagua in the Book of Changes and its artistic expression in Chinese landscape painting. Observational methods are commonly used in qualitative research. Researchers collect necessary data and information through direct observation of samples.



The data of this study is based on images using observational methods. Purposeful sampling is used to select research samples. The selection criteria include historical period, philosophical relevance and artistic significance. These samples come from major museum collections, academic publications and digital archives. This study selected a total of 9 representative landscape paintings from the Song Dynasty (960-1279) because the Song Dynasty was the golden age of the development of Chinese philosophical painting theory (Huang, 2022). The focus of the study is to observe and analyze the compositional elements and symbolic images of the paintings to understand

their philosophical basis and how to embody the principles of Yin Yang and Bagua. Particular attention is paid to the different ways in which these philosophical principles were expressed in different historical periods and schools of painting.

3.1. Sample Selection

The sample of this study consists of 9 landscape paintings shown in [Table 1](#). As shown in [Table 1](#), these works were created by Chinese painters in the Song Dynasty. When selecting the samples, special attention was paid to the representativeness, philosophical connotation and artistic achievements of the works to ensure that the research samples can fully reflect the philosophical elements in Chinese landscape paintings and embody the philosophical concepts of Yin Yang and Bagua.

Table 1: The information on sample landscape paintings

No.	Dynasty	Painter	Work Name
1	Northern Song Dynasty	Dong Yuan	 <p>"Xiao and Xiang Rivers" Source: The Palace Museum (2025a)</p>
2	Northern Song Dynasty	Guo Xi	 <p>"Early Spring" Source: National Palace Museum (2025)</p>

3 Northern Song Dynasty Fan Kuan



"Travelers among Mountains and Streams"

Source: [China Online Museum \(2025a\)](#)

4 Northern Song Dynasty Wang Ximeng



"Thousand miles of mountains and rivers"

Source: [The Palace Museum \(2025b\)](#)

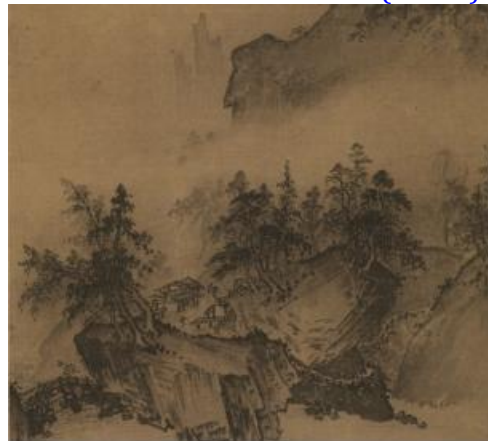
5 Northern Song Dynasty Wang Shen



"Fishing village in light snow"

Source: [The Palace Museum \(2025c\)](#)

6 Southern Song Dynasty Xia Gui



"Mountain Market, Clearing Mist"

Source: [China Online Museum \(2025b\)](#)

7 Southern Song Dynasty Ma Yuan



"On a Mountain Path in Spring"
Source: [China Online Museum \(2025c\)](#)

8 Southern Song Dynasty Liu Songnian



"Landscape of the Four Seasons"
Source: [China Online Museum \(2025d\)](#)

9 Southern Song Dynasty Li Tang



"Wind in Pines among a Myriad of Valleys"
Source: [China Online Museum \(2025e\)](#)

3.2. Application of the observation method

This study uses a systematic observation method to analyze the visual elements in landscape paintings. The observation process includes the following steps: First, observe each landscape painting as a whole and record its basic composition, theme and style characteristics. Identify the main elements in the picture, such as mountains, water, clouds, trees, etc., as well as their positions and relationships in the picture. Then observe the specific details in the picture, paying special attention to those visual expressions that may be related to the principles of Yin-Yang and Bagua, such as light and dark contrast, virtual and real relationships, and dynamic and static changes. Finally, compare the similarities and differences in the expression of the Yin-Yang and Bagua concepts in landscape paintings of the Northern and Southern Song Dynasties to identify the specific visual expressions of philosophical concepts in landscape paintings, laying a solid foundation for subsequent semiotic analysis.

3.3. Application of semiotic analysis methods

Combined with the observation method, this study uses semiotic analysis to interpret the visual symbols in landscape paintings and their philosophical meanings. Semiotic analysis focuses on how visual elements operate as carriers of meaning in a specific cultural context. The analysis methods of this study mainly include four levels: symbol recognition, structural analysis, cultural context interpretation, and meaning interpretation. First, through symbol recognition, the visual elements representing the principles of Yin and Yang Bagua in landscape paintings are identified, such as mountains symbolizing masculine power, water representing feminine power, towering peaks corresponding to Qian Gua, and calm lakes suggesting Dui Gua, etc.; secondly, structural analysis examines the relationship and organization between symbols, reveals the manifestations of Yin and Yang balance and Bagua transformation, and explores how the spatial arrangement, light and dark contrast, and morphological changes of the picture reflect philosophical concepts; thirdly, cultural context interpretation places visual symbols in the historical background of traditional Chinese philosophy and painting theory, considering the influence of artistic traditions and ideological changes on visual expression; finally, meaning interpretation analyzes the philosophical connotations conveyed by visual symbols, and explains how landscape paintings express the cosmology and natural philosophy in the Book of Changes through visual language. Through this multi-level semiotic analysis framework, this study will explore the philosophical dimension of landscape painting and reveal how the Yin-Yang and Bagua principles are embodied in specific visual forms.

4. Results

Through systematic observation and semiotic analysis of nine representative landscape paintings from the Song Dynasty, this study has made the following findings on the relationship between Yin-Yang and Bagua philosophy and the artistic expression of Chinese landscape painting:

4.1. The embodiment of the yin-yang binary opposition in the composition of landscape painting

The observation results show that the principle of yin-yang binary opposition is widely reflected in the composition of Song Dynasty landscape paintings.

The foundational compositional strategy employed across all analyzed works centers on the deliberate contrast between substantial and ethereal elements. The contrast between reality and illusion emerges as a primary method for expressing yin-yang relationships across. Landscape painters used the contrast between physical images (mountains, rocks, trees) and empty areas (clouds, mist, water vapor, and blank space) to reflect the relationship between yin and yang. Among them, Northern Song Dynasty landscape paintings such as Fan Kuan's "Travelers among Mountains and Streams" and Guo Xi's "Early Spring" tend to focus on heavy mountains (yang) and supplemented by water vapor and mist (yin); while Ma Yuan's "On a Mountain Path in Spring" in the Southern Song Dynasty increased the proportion of blank space (yin) to form different yin and yang balances.

Complementing these compositional contrasts, artists employed sophisticated tonal techniques to reinforce yin-yang relationships through visual depth and atmospheric

effects. The manipulation of light and dark contrasts provides another essential technique for creating visual representations of yin-yang dynamics through strategic ink color variations. In Northern Song Dynasty works, such as Wang Ximeng's "Thousand miles of mountains and rivers", thick and light ink, thick and light colors are used alternately to create a rich light and dark relationship. The use of colors in Southern Song Dynasty works is more subtle (Wang, 2023), such as Xia Gui's "Mountain City Clear Mist", which implies the transformation of yin and yang through the subtle changes in ink color.

These tonal strategies find natural extension in the artists' treatment of temporal and kinetic elements within their compositions. The dynamic interplay between movement and stillness represents a crucial compositional strategy found throughout all analyzed samples, the combination of dynamic elements (flowing water, clouds, wind-shaking branches) and static elements (mountains, rocks) is an important way to express the balance of yin and yang. Statistics show that 7 of the 9 samples (77.8%) contain both obvious dynamic and static elements, and the remaining 2 implicitly imply the relationship between movement and stillness.

The culmination of these various techniques appears in the masterful manipulation of spatial relationships that create philosophical depth through visual perspective. The sophisticated use of spatial relationships through traditional "three distance methods" including high distance, deep distance, and flat distance creates layered compositions that reflect the mutual transformation characteristics inherent in yin-yang philosophy. For example, Wang Shen's "Fishing village in light snow" shows the philosophical idea of the mutual roots of yin and yang through the contrast between the foreground (near, real, clear, yang) and the background (far, virtual, implicit, yin).

4.2. The embodiment of the Bagua symbol system in Song Dynasty landscape painting

The study found that the Bagua symbol system in the Book of Changes was systematically reflected in Song Dynasty landscape paintings, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Eight Trigrams (Bagua) Analysis in Chinese Landscape Paintings

Trigram	Symbol	Visual Elements	Symbolic Meaning	Representative Works	Frequency
Qian Gua (Heaven)	☰	Towering mountains, vast sky	Creativity, sublimity, strength	The main peak in Fan Kuan's "Travelers among Mountains and Streams" towers into the clouds, reflecting the creativity and sublimity of Qian Gua.	7/9 samples (77.8%)
Kun Gua (Earth)	☷	Flat earth, plains at the foot of the mountain.	Inclusiveness, nourishment, obedience.	The open plain at the foot of the mountain in Guo Xi's "Early Spring", reflects the acceptance of Kun Gua.	6/9 samples (66.7%)
Zhen Gua (Thunder)	☳	Waterfalls, rapids, dynamic mountains.	Vitality, change, vibration.	The mountain stream waterfall in Li Tang's "Wind in Pines among a Myriad of Valleys", reflecting the dynamic	5/9 samples (55.6%)

				characteristics of Zhen Gua.	
Gen Gua (Mountain)	☰	Solid rocks, cliffs	Stability, stop, introspection.	The mountains in all samples reflect the characteristics of Gen Gua, but the rocks in Wang Ximeng's "Thousand miles of mountains and rivers" are the most typical.	9/9 samples (100%)
Kan Gua (Water)	☵	Rivers, lakes, water vapor.	Flow, danger, depth.	The water surface in Dong Yuan's "Xiao and Xiang Rivers" reflects the fluidity of Kan Gua.	9/9 samples (100%)
Li Gua (Fire)	☲	Sunlight, sunrise and sunset light, red tones.	Bright, attached	The magnificent colors in Wang Ximeng's "Thousand miles of mountains and rivers" suggest the bright characteristics of the Li Gua.	4/9 samples (44.4%)
Xun Gua (Wind)	☴	Floating clouds, curved trees, wind-blown grass leaves.	soft, penetrating, humble.	The expression of wind blowing branches in Ma Yuan's "On a Mountain Path in Spring" reflects the soft characteristics of Xun Gua.	6/9 samples (66.7%)
Dui Gua (Lake)	☱	calm lake, reflections in water, humid environment.	joy, openness, communication.	Wang Shen's "Fishing Village in Light Snow" shows the calm water surface, which reflects the tranquility of Dui Gua.	5/9 samples (55.6%)

4.3. The embodiment of Yin yang and Bagua symbol system in song dynasty landscape painting

The research results show that the philosophical principles of Yin-Yang Bagua are not only reflected in the subject matter and composition of landscape paintings, but also have a profound impact on the development of artistic techniques.

The Yin-Yang philosophy is particularly prominent in the use of brush and ink, which is mainly reflected in the contrast and complementary relationship of techniques. The contrast of "thick ink" and "light ink" directly reflects the principle of the mutual generation of Yin and Yang, creating a virtual and real transformation through the change of ink color; at the same time, the combination of "dry brush" (masculine) and "wet brush" (feminine) vividly reflects the dialectical relationship of the complementary relationship between Yin and Yang, and together constitutes a vital artistic expression.

Research data shows that among the 9-representative works of Song Dynasty landscape analyzed, as many as 88.9% (8 works) of the works clearly use this kind of brush and ink techniques based on the principle of Yin-Yang opposition, proving that the integration of this philosophical thought and painting skills has become the core feature of landscape painting creation in this period.

The "three distance method" in Song Dynasty landscape painting shows a profound correspondence with the Bagua symbol system. This unique spatial construction method forms an exquisite response to the characteristics of the Gua through three different perspectives: the high and distant method shows the majestic peaks piercing the sky from an upward angle, corresponding to the lofty, strong and upward characteristics of the Qian Gua (sky); the deep and distant method creates a sense of depth in the form of overlapping layers and interlaced mountains and rivers, corresponding to the deep, flowing and changing characteristics of the Kan Gua (water); the flat and distant method handles the space in a way of broadening the vision and extending smoothly, corresponding to the inclusive, stable and broad characteristics of the Kun Gua (earth).

The core theory of traditional Chinese painting, "vivid and lively", is deeply rooted in the philosophical foundation of the mutual generation of yin and yang and the rotation of the eight trigrams. It transforms the life rhythm of nature and the laws of the universe into the highest realm of artistic expression. The expansion and condensation of clouds in Guo Xi's "Early Spring" show the flow and change characteristics of "qi". This visual expression not only reproduces natural phenomena, but also reflects the cosmic laws of the circulation of heaven and earth and the change of yin and yang; while the interactive relationship between pine branches and wind in Li Tang's "Wind in Pines among a Myriad of Valleys" vividly presents the harmonious characteristics of "rhyme". Through the fusion and interaction of the elements of Xun Gua (wind) and Gen Gua (mountain), it creates an artistic conception that combines movement and stillness, and hardness and softness, so that the viewer can feel the harmonious resonance and life rhythm between natural elements, and achieve an artistic effect of both form and spirit.

The use of blank technique in Song Dynasty landscape painting is deeply influenced by the philosophy of yin and yang, which is reflected in the exquisite balance between blank space (yin) and entity image (yang). With the development of Southern Song art, painters significantly increased the proportion of blank space in the picture. Ma Yuan's "On a Mountain Path in Spring" uses this technique to the extreme, creating an aesthetic effect through the contrast between large areas of blank space and detailed local depiction.

5. Discussion

This study reveals the deep expression of the Yin-Yang and Bagua philosophical principle in Chinese landscape painting through observation and semiotic analysis of 9 representative landscape paintings from the Song Dynasty. The results show that the Yin-Yang and Bagua thought in the Book of Changes is not only an abstract philosophical concept, but also the inherent guiding principle of Chinese landscape painting creation and the structural framework of visual expression. Based on the research findings, the following aspects deserve further discussion:

5.1. The relationship between Yin-Yang and Bagua and the aesthetic system of landscape painting

The research results show that the Yin-Yang and Bagua concept constitutes the philosophical basis of the aesthetic system of Chinese landscape painting. This relationship is not a simple theme mapping, but is reflected in multiple levels of artistic creation.

At the foundational formal level, formal elements such as the contrast between reality and illusion, the change of light and shade, the combination of movement and stillness, and the level of distance in landscape painting are essentially visual expressions of the principle of unity of opposites between yin and yang (Zhang, 2021). These formal elements not only have visual beauty, but also carry philosophical thinking about the generation and operation of the universe (Wang et al., 2024). For example, the contrast between the towering peaks (yang) and the flowing stream (yin) in Fan Kuan's "Travelers among Mountains and Streams" is not only a visual balance, but also a symbol of the complementary relationship between yin and yang in the universe.

Building upon these formal foundations, the technical innovations developed during the Song Dynasty represent a sophisticated transformation of abstract philosophical concepts into concrete artistic methodologies. The "three-distance method", various texture methods, and ink methods developed by landscape painters in the Song Dynasty can be understood to transform the Bagua symbol system into a specific painting language. For example, the linear structure of "hemp-covered texture" reflects the vigorous characteristics of the Qian Gua (Hong, 2023), while the dot structure of "raindrop texture" reflects the flow characteristics of the Kan Gua (Ji, 2021). This correspondence between technique and philosophy makes Chinese landscape painting transcend the simple reproduction of nature and become a visual carrier of philosophical concepts.

These formal and technical achievements converge in the pursuit of transcendent artistic conception that represents the highest integration of aesthetic and philosophical goals. The aesthetic concepts such as "lively spirit" and "learning from nature and getting the source of the heart" pursued by landscape painting are essentially the extension of the Yin-Yang Bagua thought in artistic creation (Xu, 2015; Jiang, 2016). Painters create artistic conceptions with both formal beauty and philosophical connotations by balancing Yin-Yang and coordinating the visual elements of Bagua. For example, the combination of large areas of blank space (yin) and detailed local description (yang) in Ma Yuan's "On a Mountain Path in Spring" creates a profound artistic conception.

5.2. The philosophical turn of landscape painting in the Northern and Southern Song dynasties

The differences in the expression of Yin-Yang and Bagua between Northern Song and Southern Song landscape paintings found in the study reflect the important changes in philosophical thoughts and aesthetic tastes in the two periods.

The most fundamental transformation manifests in the shift from cosmic objectivity to subjective experience. Northern Song landscape paintings are dominated by panoramic compositions, emphasizing the objective reproduction of grand natural landscapes,

reflecting the holistic cosmic view of "harmony between man and nature" (Ye & Zhang, 2007); in contrast, Southern Song landscape paintings are characterized by partial compositions and a large amount of blank space, emphasizing personal subjective experience and emotional expression, reflecting the philosophical shift from objective cosmic view to subjective experience (Ma, 2002). This shift is closely related to the development of Neo-Confucianism and the rise of the philosophical thought of "studying things to gain knowledge" during the Southern Song Dynasty (Wang, 2018).

This philosophical transformation directly influenced symbolic preferences and compositional choices throughout both periods. In Northern Song landscape paintings, symbols representing stable order such as Qian Gua (sky) and Gen Gua (mountain) are more prominent. As the times change, Southern Song paintings tend to prefer elements representing fluidity and change such as Kan Gua (water) and Xun Gua (wind). This shift in symbol selection is closely related to the political environment at the time, because from the Northern Song Dynasty's pursuit of the political ideal of great unity to the Southern Song Dynasty's profound thinking on change and adaptability in the face of national division (Shen & Lou, 2013; Xu, 2021).

These changes in philosophical outlook and symbolic emphasis culminated in a fundamental redefinition of artistic priorities and technical approaches. Northern Song Dynasty landscape painters focused on the integrity of the image and the precise depiction of details, pursuing an accurate grasp of natural forms, while Southern Song Dynasty landscape paintings paid more attention to the creation of artistic conception and the expression of emotions (Ma, 2002). This shift reflects the development of artistic expression from "resemblance in form" to "resemblance in spirit" (Jiang, 2006) and also reflects the flexible application of Yin-Yang and Bagua philosophy in artistic practice.

5.3. The relationship between Yin-Yang Bagua and the aesthetic system of landscape painting

The semiotic analysis of this study shows that there is a visual symbol system based on Yin-Yang and Bagua in Chinese landscape painting. The visual elements in landscape painting (mountains, water, clouds, trees, etc.) are not randomly combined, but systematically encoded according to the relationship between Yin and Yang and the Eight Diagrams (Wang, 2016). For example, the configuration of mountains and water is not only a reproduction of natural landscapes, but also a philosophical expression of the harmony of heaven and earth, and the combination of rigidity and flexibility; the relationship between clouds and rocks is not only a visual effect, but also a manifestation of Yin and Yang that combines virtuality and reality, and movement and stillness.

Furthermore, the depth of interpretation of this symbol system depends on the background knowledge of traditional Chinese culture. The visual elements in landscape painting are not only the presentation of aesthetic forms, but also the materialized expression of philosophical thoughts (Lin & Zhang, 2024); these elements convey complex cosmic concepts and life wisdom through specific encoding methods. However, viewers who lack the corresponding cultural background knowledge can only perceive the beauty of the formal appearance, but cannot interpret the deep philosophical implications contained therein (Riley, 2024). This difference in cultural interpretation reveals the inseparability of visual symbols and cultural traditions, and also reminds us of the complex challenges faced by cross-cultural artistic understanding.

6. Conclusion

This study systematically examines the visual expression of Yin-Yang and Bagua philosophy in Song Dynasty landscape painting through observation and semiotic analysis. The study shows that it not only constitutes the core conceptual system of ancient Chinese philosophy, but also has been systematically reflected in visual art as the internal structure and organizational principle of Chinese landscape painting. This deep integration of philosophy and art has shaped the unique aesthetic characteristics and cultural value of Chinese landscape painting, making it different from other painting traditions in the world.

In landscape painting, the principle of the unity of opposites of Yin-Yang binary opposition is visually expressed through the contrast of virtuality and reality, changes in light and dark, the combination of movement and stillness, and the level of distance; at the same time, the Bagua symbol system is concretely presented through natural elements such as mountains, water, clouds, and trees and various artistic techniques. The differences in the expression of Yin-Yang and Bagua in landscape painting between the Northern Song Dynasty and the Southern Song Dynasty reflect the different understandings and artistic applications of philosophical thoughts under different historical backgrounds. These research findings not only enrich our understanding of Chinese landscape painting, but also provide valuable inspiration for contemporary art creation, showing the contemporary value and creativity of traditional philosophical resources. Although the study is subject to challenges such as sample limitations and subjective interpretation, the exploration of this topic could be further deepened by expanding the sample scope, deepening the analysis methods, and expanding the research perspective in the future.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

The researchers used the research ethics provided by the Research Ethics Committee of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM). All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee. Informed consent was obtained from all participants according to the Declaration of Helsinki.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of Interest.

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