

Translating Philosophy into Art: Taoism, Zen, and Phenomenology from Classical Thought to Contemporary Practice

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ABSTRACT

This article looks at the transition of philosophical concepts to artistic practice. From a cross-cultural, transhistorical perspective, it systematically explores the practical applications of traditional Chinese philosophy (Taoism and Zen Buddhism) and Western philosophy (phenomenology) in artistic creation—examining how Taoist “interdependence of nihility and existence” and Qi, along with Zen “void,” shaped Chinese literati painting’s aesthetic core (negative space) and were innovatively translated in contemporary installation art via ready-made objects and bodily perception, as well as how phenomenological perceptual intuition underpinned Impressionism’s fleeting light and shadow and contemporary installation’s spatial intervention. Using qualitative research, literature analysis, and case studies, it breaks away from traditional frameworks by delving into three innovative dimensions: the evolution of creative spaces, the division of temporal expression, and the transformation of philosophical intervention methods. The research demonstrates that philosophical concepts are not statically put into art. Instead, they become the generative essence of artistic practice through a dynamic exchange with creative situations, medium characteristics, and the spirit of the present era. Ultimately, be it the introspective merging of philosophy and soul in Chinese literati painting or the interactive joining of philosophy, senses, and society in Impressionism and installation art, their essence is humanity’s eternal quest for the essence of existence by means of art.

Keywords: *Chinese literati painting, Installation art, Impressionism, Chinese philosophy, Phenomenology*



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1 INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history of art, philosophy and art have had fascinating and profound interactions. This interaction is not a one-way relationship of philosophy influencing art or art interpreting philosophy but rather a dynamic, mutually generative dialogue (Gadamer, 2004) in which artists use their creative practices to transform abstract philosophical concepts into concrete visual language, spatial forms, or sensory experiences. Simultaneously, creative activity has consistently flowed back into philosophy, allowing abstract conceptual frameworks to become concrete (Schelling, 1989). This article uses Chinese and Western philosophy as its twin axis, focusing on two trajectories: Chinese traditional philosophy (Taoism and Zen Buddhism) through literati painting to contemporary installation art and Western phenomenology through Impressionism to contemporary installation art. It investigates how philosophical ideas might transcend theoretical restrictions and become the creative centre of artistic expression.

From a methodological standpoint, traditional research frequently regards philosophy as a static 'root' and focuses on the traces of philosophy's influence on art (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004), such as the influence of Taoist thought on the use of negative space (liú bái, 留白) in Chinese literati painting and the inspiration of phenomenology on the use of light and shadow in Impressionism. However, this viewpoint frequently portrays art as a passive recipient. This article proposes the triple transformation dimension of philosophy and art in an attempt to break through this habitual way of thinking: philosophy as the spiritual core in literati painting, as the creation of perception in Impressionism, and as a social medium in contemporary installations. These three dimensions show the historical growth of the reciprocal change between philosophy and art, as well as the creative reconstruction of philosophy via art.

This exploration is particularly significant in the context of rising globalisation and digitalisation. When the negative space of Chinese literati painting meets the spatiality of installation art, and the fleeting light and shadow of the moment of Impressionism collide with the on-site experience of installation art, the artistic translation of philosophical concepts is no longer limited by a single cultural context but instead sparks cross-cultural dialogue. The ultimate goal of this article is to reveal the timeless dialogue between philosophy and art by examining these historical and contemporary practices: both disciplines have always revolved around the core theme of the meaning of existence, exploring humanity's perception of the world and the boundaries of self-expression through their respective approaches.

2 THE ARTISTIC TRANSLATION OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE PHILOSOPHY: FROM LITERATI PAINTING TO CONTEMPORARY INSTALLATION ART

The incorporation of traditional Chinese philosophy into art is a type of introspective presentation. Painters transform the Taoist concept of the interdependence of nihility and existence (空-有, kōng-yǒu) and the Zen Buddhist concept of void into the spatial arrangement and brushwork rhythm of Chinese literati painting (Wiseman, 2010). Rather than actively acting in art through theoretical debate, they eventually appear as a visible aesthetic mood. The transformation has not faded with time but rather flows via installation art in more current experimental media, resulting in a contemporary reconstruction of classical philosophy.

2.1 The Spiritual Structure of Taoist Philosophy and Chinese Literati Painting

In the *Tao Te Ching*, Laozi emphasised that usefulness often depends on what is absent, noting that “the empty space within gives the vessel its function” (Laozi, 1891/2008, p. 24). This idea shows that nihility is not mere nothingness but exists in mutual transformation with being. In Chinese literati painting, this principle is shaped by two key aspects: the spatial interplay of nihility and existence and the vitalistic rhythm of Qi. Painters used expansive blank space to stimulate the viewer's imagination, allowing emptiness to convey meanings beyond the brushstrokes themselves (Liu et al., 2023).

Ma Yuan's *Angler on a Wintry Lake* (see Figure 1) is an excellent illustration of this metamorphosis. A little boat and a fisherman represent existence; the wide swath of white space made of the river and sky represents nihility. However, this blank space is more than just a visual portrayal of emptiness; through the fisherman's position and the rippling water, it alludes to the flow of the river and the desolation of winter. As a result, when viewers gaze at the blank area, their imaginations are triggered to fill the emptiness. At this point, nihility evolves into existence—a place full of vitality—interpreting the idea of 'the interdependence of nihility and existence'. This approach is consistent with Taoist philosophy, which claims that the Tao resides in the ants and the weeds. In other words, the genuine Tao is not a physical thing but rather a subtle creative energy buried between nihility and existence.



Figure 1 *Angler on a Wintry Lake* (ca. 1190–1225)
(Source: Ma Yuan, Ink and colour on silk, 26.7 × 50.6 cm, Tokyo National Museum, Copyright Consent: Permissible to Publish)

Taoist thought further emphasises Qi (vital breath) as the life force permeating all things. Zhuangzi described it as “All under the sky there is one breath of life” (Zhuangzi, 1999, p. 363). In literati painting, Qi is expressed through the rhythm of brush and ink. For example, Huang Gongwang’s *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains* (see Figure 2) exemplifies this, where fluid strokes and shifting ink tones evoke the circulation of Qi, imbuing the still landscape with vitality and spiritual resonance.

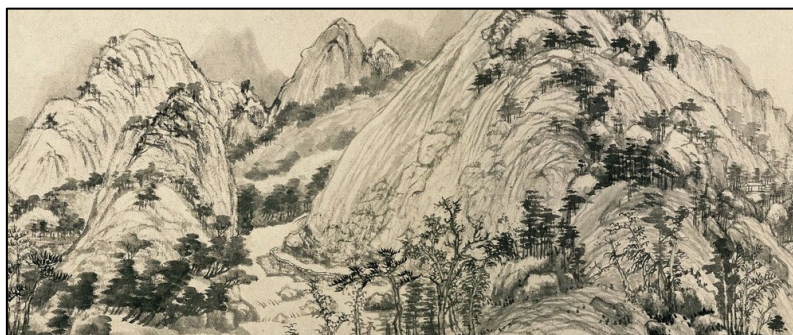


Figure 2 Part of *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains* (ca. 1348–1350)
(Source: Huang Gongwang, Handscroll, ink on paper, 31.8 × 51.4 cm, Zhejiang Provincial Museum, Hangzhou, Copyright Consent: Permissible to Publish)

The Zen Buddhist notion of void inspired Chinese literati painting with an aesthetic sense of asceticism. Ni Zan’s sparse landscapes embody the Zen notion of void, where a few strokes suggest vastness and purity. He confessed, “What I call painting is little more than a few careless brushstrokes, not aiming to capture the shape” (Ni Zan, as cited in Collection Series, 2000, p.700). Such simplicity invites viewers into contemplative emptiness. Through contemplation, the viewers are invited to reach the Zen Buddhist condition of forgetting the self and the object, temporarily putting aside the distractions of reality.

2.2 Innovative Practices of Traditional Philosophical Concepts in Contemporary Installation Art

Contemporary installation art reimagines traditional Chinese philosophy, representing a change from introspection to intervention. As art has progressed, artists are no longer satisfied to portray ideas only through brush and ink. Instead, they use ready-made objects, settings, and other interactive, immersive media to bring Taoism and Zen Buddhism’s abstract concepts to vivid sensory domains. This change preserves traditional philosophy’s spiritual essence while also addressing the necessity to adapt to modern challenges.

Xu Bing’s *A Book of the Sky* (1987-1991; see Figure 3) is a modern interpretation of the Zen Buddhist distinction between words and meaning. The work is made up of thousands of pseudo-

characters that use the structural logic of Chinese characters but have no true significance. When viewers, particularly those who are familiar with Chinese, try to read these letters, they encounter themselves in a familiar yet incomprehensible situation—one that graphically represents Zen Buddhism's transcendence of language and text. Xu Bing deconstructs the semantic nature of language to uncover the subtle distinctions that lie between words and meaning, and it is just this subtlety that defines the core of Tao. Unlike literati painting, which uses negative space to imply the unspeakable, *A Book from the Sky* uses excessive symbols to compel viewers to consider the limitations of language and seek the source of meaning, reigniting Zen Buddhism's exploration of linguistic meaning in a modern context (Tsao & Ames, 2011).



Figure 3 *A Book from the Sky* (1987–1991)

(Source: Xu Bing, Installation view, Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, Texas, USA, 2016, Copyright Consent: Permissible to Publish)

Similar engagements can be found in Chen Zhen's *Daily Incantations* (1996; see Figure 4), where the Taoist concept of the interdependence of nihility and existence transforms into a participatory installation that uses the body's senses. The work employs mechanical mechanisms to cause discarded goods like toilets, clocks, and radios to repeatedly execute the activity of chanting—the toilet flushes automatically, the radio plays news segments, and the clock hands move chaotically. These normal items, stripped of their utilitarian roles, transform into receptacles for spiritual expression. When confronted with these derailed items, viewers cannot help but contemplate the link between abstract concepts and physical objects, or spirit and matter. Chen Zhen reinterprets Laozi's dialectic by transforming discarded objects into spiritual vessels, where emptiness of utility becomes fullness of meaning (Vincent-Goubeau and Bouillon, 2017).



Figure 4 *Daily Incantations* (1996)

(Source: Chen Zhen, Mixed media installation, 230 × 700 × 350 cm, The Dakis Joannou Collection, Athens; installation view, *Daily Incantations*, Deitch Projects, New York, 1996, Photo: Tony Powell, Copyright Consent: Permissible to Publish)

Mei Fa Chai's *Ancestor* (2022; see Figure 5) explores the Taoist concept of the cyclical nature of Qi by using burnt wood as its fundamental material. The work makes use of charred wood left over from a fire that is sliced and rebuilt to produce shapes like bones and vines, symbolising rebirth. The black texture of the charred wood represents both destruction and hope, with death and rebirth implying that when things reach their extreme, they inevitably transform into their opposites (Chen, 2022), as revealed

by Laozi's "The movement of the Tao by contraries proceeds" (Laozi, Legge trans., 2008, p. 75) in his exposition of the laws of the universe. Unlike Chinese literati painting, which uses dry wood and rocks to represent integrity, the burnt wood in *Rebirth* carries memories of nature and history, establishing a conversation between the Taoist concept of Qi circulation and modern environmental challenges and cultural heritage conservation. This transition enables traditional philosophy to transcend its indifference to fame and riches and become a source of ideas for addressing real-world issues (Wang, 2022).



Figure 5 *Ancestor* (2022)

(Source: Mei Fachai, Wood carbonization, 350 × 50 × 50 cm, Ningbo Museum of Art, Copyright Consent: Permissible to Publish)

Contemporary installation art and the regeneration of ancient painting techniques embody the contemporary reconstruction of the ancient Chinese philosophy. A good illustration would be Lin Ruoxi of the Lingnan School, who, following tradition, has achieved a contemporary interpretation of the Taoist and Zen spirit in terms of painting without the use of bones, with only flowers and birds. Water has become the centre of his painting (see Figure 6), where the traditional conceptions are turned inside out to signify the flowing life of the Taoism aesthetics. By flooding the strict lines with colour blocks, he introduces a transition between the form and the picture, which resembles the whole Taoist-Zen aesthetic goal. Also, he has been able to be current in five areas such as technique (Duan et al., 2024) and a blend of Chinese, Western, and Japanese creative languages without replacing the conventional painterly sphere. The activity of Lin Ruoxi confirms the existing creative translation of ancient thought because it is adopted by the dual approach of preserving a certain spirit and using the contemporary language. This renews Taoist-Zen spirituality, which produces a novel dynamic pattern in the development of creative translation.



Figure 1 *Fragrance* (1991)

(Source: Collection of the National Art Museum of China, Ink and colour on paper, 107 × 105 cm)

2.3 The Logic of Translation: From Conveying Meaning to Addressing Issues

When translating philosophical concepts from Chinese literati painting to contemporary installation art, a clear developmental trajectory emerges from carrying meaning to intervening in concerns. The basic concept of literati painting is expressed through brushwork and negative space, creating an implicit spiritual place for viewers to explore, with its core being the conversation between the self and nature. The theory of contemporary installations is to translate abstract concepts into perceptible manifest areas using ready-made materials and space, typically accompanied by observations on societal concerns, with the core being a conversation between the person and society.

This evolution is an adaptive transformation of philosophical concepts in various circumstances, with the core staying within traditional philosophy. The Taoist concept of the interdependence of nihilism and existence is reflected in literati painting as the spatial arrangement of negative space and brushwork and in Xu Bing's *A Book from the Sky* as the deconstructive link between characters and meaning. Ni Zan's landscape paintings communicate the Zen concept of void as a transcendent sensation of detachment, whereas Mei Fachai's *Rebirth* expresses it as the dialectic of trauma and rebirth. What varies is the medium and perspective of expression, but what stays constant is the endless inquiry into the spiritual core, the substance of existence, and its significance. This is exactly where the power of converting thought into art resides.

3 WESTERN PHENOMENOLOGICAL ART PRACTICE: FROM IMPRESSIONISM TO SPATIAL INTERVENTION

In the history of Western art, phenomenology's influence on art is a form of intuitive intervention. Husserl's call to "return to the thing itself" (Husserl, 1999) and Merleau-Ponty's bodily perception (Merleau-Ponty & Smith, 1962) have evolved into the Impressionists' capture of fleeting light and shadow, as well as contemporary installations' involvement in space, rather than theoretical frameworks directly governing art. Finally, this resulted in an artistic approach of confronting existence. This shift has affected not just the way art portrays reality, but it has also reshaped the viewer-artwork dynamic.

3.1 Phenomenology: Perceptual Intuition and Impressionism's Instantaneity

Art "isms" are the visual and creative principles through which artists translate abstract philosophical ideas into concrete artistic practice (Desa et al., 2020), and Impressionism, an important artistic "ism" in the 19th century, is essentially the visualisation of phenomenological perceptual intuition in the field of painting. The core principles of this artistic "ism" are highly consistent with the core propositions of phenomenology and thus guide the Impressionists to form a unique creative approach of capturing the immediate perceptual experience of the world.

The Impressionists' quest for direct perception is consistent with phenomenology. Husserl's concept of epoché requires temporarily suspending a priori knowledge of things and confronting their mode of appearance in consciousness (Husserl, 2014); Merleau-Ponty went on to say that perception is not a mirror reflection of the subject on the object but rather the fusion of the body and the world (Merleau-Ponty & Smith, 1962). This theory is consistent with the Impressionists' creative thought, as they no longer aimed to duplicate the eternal essence of classical painting but rather concentrated on the present manifestation of things under certain lighting and perspectives.

Monet's *Water Lilies* series (see Figure 7) is considered the peak of this creative style. In these works, Monet abandoned the usual logic of landscape painting in favour of focusing on the pond's surface and the dynamic play of light and shadow on the water lilies at different times of the day. The same water lilies seem foggy purple-blue in the morning mist, glitter with golden spots in the midday

sun, and glow orange-red in the evening dusk. These paintings do not reflect the essence of water lilies but rather immediately record the present moment's impression of light and shadow (Harris, 2003)—as phenomenology underlines, existence is perception. Monet reportedly observed, “Landscapes have no meaning in themselves; their appearance changes from moment to moment” (Van Dyke, 2019). According to Merleau-Ponty (1962), perception is a conversation between the body and the environment. This sensitivity to atmosphere and light is one of them.



Figure 6 *The Water Lilies – Setting Sun* (1920–1926)

(Source: Claude Monet, Oil on canvas, 200 × 600 cm, Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris, Google Art Project, Copyright Consent: Permissible to Publish)

Other Impressionists explored related concerns. Renoir's figure paintings are an artistic expression of the phenomenological premise of the primacy of physical perception (Merleau-Ponty & Smith, 1962). Renoir avoided comprehensive portrayals of the figures' facial features and outlines in the *Dance at Le Moulin de la Galette* (1876; see Figure 8), instead capturing the play of light and shadow on skin and clothing with light brushstrokes and brilliant colours. Sunlight flows through the foliage, producing dancing spots of light on the dancers. These patches of light mix smoothly with their skin and skirt hems, no longer existing only for their purpose, but also as a vital part of the perceptual experience (Richman-Abdou, 2020). When viewers enjoy a picture, they are drawn to the warmth of the sun and the vibrancy of the dance, rather than the identity of the characters depicted. Phenomenology's basic perception is precisely the sensory experience that precedes cognition. The sunlight, air, and colours in Renoir's paintings essentially constitute a perceptual field where the body and the environment merge.



Figure 7 *Dance at Le Moulin de la Galette* (1876)

(Source: Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Oil on canvas, 131 × 175 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris, Google Art Project, Copyright Consent: Permissible to Publish)

Degas's *Dancers* series (see Figure 9) investigates phenomenology's dynamic perception. Unlike Monet and Renoir, who focused on static light and shadow, Degas used blurred shapes and overlapping brushstrokes to represent the transient positions of dancers in motion. These stances are not static acts but rather transitional positions between about to happen and just accomplished, which coincides with phenomenology's description of the fluid character of perception—the view of objects is constantly in the process of becoming rather than completely completed (Husserl, 1997). Degas' purposeful blurring of the dancers' feet and hands maintains the raw vitality of perception, recognising that dynamic perception cannot be properly recorded.



Figure 8 *Three Dancers Preparing for Class* (after 1878)

(Source: Edgar Degas, Oil on canvas, 32 × 46 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Google Art Project, Copyright Consent: Permissible to Publish)

3.2 The Extension of The Phenomenology of Perception in Contemporary Installation Art

Phenomenology has transcended painting's two-dimensional restrictions in contemporary installation art, extending bodily perception into three-dimensional interactive environments. Artists no longer confine themselves to reproducing perception on a two-dimensional canvas but instead construct perceptual fields that allow viewers to immerse themselves, giving the phenomenological concept that the body is the place where the world is perceived a more direct form of expression (Merleau-Ponty & Smith, 1962).

Leandro Erlich's *Swimming Pool* (1999; see Figure 10) presents Merleau-Ponty's idea of embodied perception, which holds that the viewer's experience is determined by their bodily position and movement inside the environment (Merleau-Ponty & Smith, 1962). The work splits the area into two sections by a clear glass panel: above the glass is what looks to be the real surface of a swimming pool, while below is a corridor through which viewers can travel. When viewers enter the corridor, they see ripples and reflections on the water's surface, as well as light spots projected onto the pathway as if they were underwater; nevertheless, when they reach out to touch it, all they feel is icy glass. From above, viewers may discern ghostly silhouettes in the empty pool (Liu, 2021). This contrast between visual truth and tactile lie stimulates the viewer's physical experience while also challenging them to consider how to decide the presence of reality and significance. This question directly refers to Husserl's claim that phenomenon is essence, which states that the existence of objects is not independent of observation but is formed via the expression of perception (Husserl, 1999). *Swimming Pool*, unlike Impressionism, which captures light and shadow to perceive reality, deconstructs the viewer's cognitive boundaries through spatial design, transforming the viewer from an observer to a participant in perception. This completes the transition from reproduction to participation in the creation of meaning (Duchamp & Peterson, 1975).

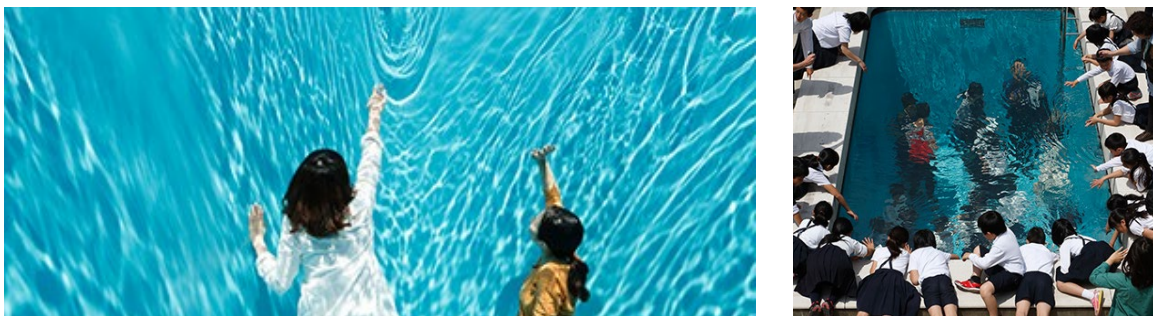


Figure 9 *Swimming Pool* (1999) (Source: Leandro Erlich, 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, Japan, <https://www.leandroerlich.art>, Copyright Consent: Permissible to Publish)

Donald Judd's works, on the other hand, emphasise the phenomenological "self-explanatory nature of objects". While artists frequently focus on the notion of Specific Objects; Judd rejects the symbolic character of conventional sculpture by using industrial materials. In *Untitled (Stack)* (1967; see Figure 11), twelve cubes of galvanised iron are put on the wall in a neat-by-breaking pattern. The cubes' spacing is precisely calibrated, which makes the viewer feel a physical sense of breakage (Judd, 1975). The artist eliminates cultural symbols and emotional projections, leaving just the existence of objects to provide significance. It also mirrors Merleau-Ponty's ambiguity of objects—the existence of objects is given meaning by human experience while retaining their transcendence. The encounter between viewers and objects reshapes the essence of existence, hidden by ordinary cognition, and reveals the transcendence of objects themselves.



Figure 10 *Untitled (Stack)* (1967) (Source: Donald Judd, Lacquer on galvanized iron, 10 units each $15.2 \times 68.6 \times 61$ cm, installed with 15.2 cm intervals, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Copyright Consent: Permissible to Publish)

James Turrell's light and shadow creations take phenomenology's pure perception to an extreme. In his *Skyspace I* (1990; see Figure 12), he manipulates space and light to create a realm where only light and colour exist. When the viewer enters the space, they progressively lose their traditional perspective of time and space and instead experience a highly concentrated visual sensory condition (Spector, (n.d.)). This unique perceptual shift is phenomenologically consistent with Husserl's epoché theoretical paradigm, resulting in transcendent cognitive detachment from experience. Turrell was reminded of a tangible light - palpable light - and he created the conditions for perceiving light. These conditions are fundamentally beyond ordinary perception, allowing viewers to experience the pure consciousness defined by phenomenology through their interaction with light. Unlike the Impressionists, who strove to depict natural light, Turrell's artificial light more fully removes object interference, erasing the boundaries between subject and object and serving as a medium for the conversation between perception and existence (Artsy Editorial, 2013).



Figure 11 *Skyspace I* (1990) (Source: James Turrell, Aperture cut into plaster wall with tinted glass and fluorescent light, $287.7 \times 287.7 \times 287.7$ cm, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Copyright Consent: Permissible to Publish)

3.3 The Logic of Translation: From Perceptual Recording to Perceptual Construction

The transition of phenomenology from Impressionism to contemporary installation art marks a shift from perceptual recording to perceptual construction. Impressionism captures the natural expression of seen phenomena through colour and brushstrokes, with its core being passive reception; contemporary installation art develops perceptual fields accessible to involvement through space and materials, with its core being active creation. This progression demonstrates that existence is not only acknowledged, but also manifested via perception.

Monet's *Water Lilies* and Terrel's *Skyspace I* are diametrically opposed: the former sees external light while the latter activates internal perception, and the former's viewers are bystanders while the latter's viewers are participants. Nonetheless, both exemplify the essential ethos of phenomenology: observing the present moment as it unfolds and challenging past recognition. This mentality ensures that the translation of phenomenology in contemporary art, with its various media, stays attentive to the authenticity of existence.

4 METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative, interpretive approach at the intersection of art history and philosophy, focusing on how ideas are translated into artistic practice. The methods included literature analysis, case studies, and cross-cultural comparison. Key philosophical texts—such as Laozi's *Tao Te Ching* (Legge, 2008), Zhuangzi's writings (Legge, 2015), Zen Buddhist reflections (Feng, 1948), Husserl's *Ideas I* (2014) and *The Idea of Phenomenology* (1999), and Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (Merleau-Ponty & Smith, 1962)—were studied alongside art-historical research (Snyder, 2019; Tsao & Ames, 2011). Case studies were chosen to show how concepts move from philosophy into visual practice, based on their connection to philosophical themes, their use of different media, and their historical importance. The analysis was structured around three dimensions: creative space, temporal expression, and modes of intervention.

The research was framed by philosophical hermeneutics and art semiotics. Gadamer's hermeneutics (Regan, 2012) supports the view that the meaning of philosophy in art emerges through dialogue between past and present. Semiotic analysis, drawing on Barthes (Yan & Ming, 2015), was used to understand how artistic forms act as symbols of philosophical meaning. Two limitations were noted. First, case selection was partly subjective, even though care was taken to choose representative works (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Second, cross-cultural comparison might risk oversimplification, since Chinese and Western traditions arise from different contexts. These risks were managed through careful contextualisation and interpretive balance.

5 CROSS-DIMENSIONAL COMPARISON: CONTEXTUAL DIFFERENCES AND COMMONALITIES IN PHILOSOPHICAL TRANSFORMATION

In different cultural contexts, creative translations of Chinese and Western philosophy share a similar pursuit of transcendent existence. By comparing the three dimensions of creative space, temporal expression, and philosophical intervention methods, one can better understand the differences and similarities between Chinese and Western expressions, as well as the underlying logic of philosophical concept translation through art.

5.1 Philosophical Metaphors in Creative Spaces

The differing locations of artistic creation essentially reflect different philosophical readings of the universe. Chinese literati painting creates introspective spaces such as study rooms and pavilions, aligning with Taoist philosophy's cognitive path of seeking the way inward. Impressionism's creative spaces are outdoor natural settings, embodying phenomenology's experiential philosophy of confronting the present moment. Contemporary installation art actively creates public areas where the virtual and real worlds intersect, breaking down the barriers between subject and object and symbolising philosophy's transition from contemplation to intervention.

The study room in Chinese literati painting represents a microcosm of cosmic order. Ni Zan's Qingbi Pavilion is a spiritual environment made up of old zithers, scriptures, and brush and ink. The painter translates his perceptions from nature into brush and ink, cleansing the mind to perceive the Tao (Collection Series, 2000). This introspective method echoes earlier Taoist and Zen ideals, where inner spaces foster spiritual openness. As Laozi wrote, "Without going outside his door, one understands all under heaven" (Tao Te Ching, Legge, 2008 ch. 47). Literati studios thus became microcosms of the cosmos, bridging inward reflection and universal order.

The Impressionists' natural scene is an expansive area that dissolves into the subject while embracing the moment. Monet sought to break free from the constraints of the studio by practising phenomenology's deconstruction of subject-centredness in the process of confronting nature's present manifestation—only by merging the body with nature can one escape the shackles of a priori cognition and attain pure perception (Merleau-Ponty & Smith, 1962). The light and hues of the natural world, with their unpredictable and changeable properties, constitute the assurance of perceptual authenticity.

Contemporary installations employ public places (such as urban installations) as a means of philosophical intervention in society. Xu Bing's *A Book from the Sky* has been shown in public areas all around the world, utilising pseudo-characters to create a cross-cultural interaction environment. The choice of space reflects the union of the Taoist idea 'the world belongs to all' and phenomenological intersubjectivity—philosophy is no more a personal spiritual practice but rather a platform for public discourse. Chen Zhen's *Prayer Wheel - Money Makes the Mare Go (Chinese Slang)* (1997) uses a gigantic prayer wheel to address significant concerns for society, investigating the relationship between material existence and spiritual endeavour.

5.2 The Philosophical Basis of Temporal Expressions

Different manifestations of temporality in different cultural contexts reflect distinct philosophical understandings of continuity of existence. Chinese literati painting seeks eternity by reflecting the Taoist concept of Qi; Impressionism captures transience, which implies a phenomenological, present-oriented view of time; and contemporary installations present reorganisation of fragments, a postmodern philosophical deconstruction of the linearity of time.

The eternity of literati art affirms the cycle of time. Huang Gongwang spent three years painting *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains*, combining elements of spring, summer, autumn, and winter into his brushwork. The image represents the cyclical nature of the seasons and the passage of time, rather than a precise point. This condensation of time is consistent with the Taoist cosmology of Qi circulation, allowing viewers to experience the endless movement of time and nature inside the static image.

Impressionism's transience stems from its unwavering belief in the immediacy of time. Monet painted the same scene many times—not to create a complete perception but to capture the light, shadow, and colour of this instant moment. This fragmented recording is consistent with phenomenology's understanding of temporal awareness, which holds that time is not a linear, continuous totality but rather a fluid process made up of multiple presents (Husserl, 1997). Each

painting displays previous impressions while also containing future visual possibilities. Impressionist paintings therefore crystallise time, maintaining perception's raw energy.

The reorganisation of fragments from contemporary installations disrupts the linear and cyclical character of time, resulting in a multidimensional temporal and spatial realm. Chen Zhen's *Le Bureau de Change* (1996-2004; see Figure 13) converted a public toilet in Shanghai from the 1980s into a bank counter and placed financial tools, such as a money-counting machine and a safe deposit box, in it. The sounds of the toilet flushing and the money counting machine were played at the same time, establishing a conversation between various periods and locations, allowing multiple cultures to collide, and highlighting the ludicrous link between material trade and bodily necessities (Vincent-Goubeau and Bouillon, 2017). The approach is based on Taoist conceptions of spacetime perception and incorporates phenomenological theories that time is a fabrication of perception. Finally, it examines the alienation of time in the globalised period by deconstructing materiality and finding the real state of existence inside fractured time.



Figure 12 *Le Bureau de Change (Detail)* (1996–2004) (Source: Chen Zhen, Courtesy of Galleria Continua, San Gimignano / Beijing / Les Moulins; photo provided by Rockbund Art Museum, Copyright Consent: Permissible to Publish)

5.3 The Evolution of Philosophical Intervention Methods

Philosophy's effect on art, from the implicit spiritual core to the explicit sensory medium to public social concerns, reflects the historical development of art's role. In Chinese literati painting, philosophy is the invisible framework of artistic conception; in impressionism, it is the visible principle of perception; and in contemporary installation art, it is a tool for social dialogue.

The philosophical intervention in literati art is implicit. Wang Wei's "poetry in painting, painting in poetry" includes the Taoist concept of harmony between heaven and man via landscape design and brushstroke rhythm. The artist enables viewers to experience the concept while admiring the painting - a feeling that transcends words and reaches the spiritual level, finally attaining the embodiment of Tao.

Impressionism's philosophical involvement is manifest. Philosophy becomes the methodology that guides creativity, and artists' discussions and emphasis on perception and light are essentially artistic declarations of phenomenological intuition. The jumping hues and flowing brushstrokes convey the perception-first creative ethos straight to viewers.

The philosophical intervention of contemporary installations is public. Xu Bing's *Where Does the Dust Itself Collect?* (2004; see Figure 14) employed dust from the 9/11 attacks to spell out the Zen verse, "As there is nothing from the first, where does the dust itself collect?" across the gallery floor (Xu, n.d.). The work reflects on the themes of war and disaster by exploring Taoist concepts of 'nihility' and Zen notions of 'void'. Entering the space, viewers encounter not only the metaphysical depth of philosophy but also the trauma of lived history, as philosophy becomes a bridge between personal experience and communal memory.



Figure 13 *Where Does the Dust Itself Collect?* (2004) (Source: Xu Bing, Material: dust. Retrieved from <https://www.xubing.com>, Copyright Consent: Permissible to Publish)

The democratisation of philosophy can also be accomplished with the help of the visual constructions of abstract geometrical forms in the form of the modern public sculpture of Southeast Asia. One of the examples is Ramlan Abdullah, a Malaysian artist, who interprets abstract ideas like cosmic equilibrium and spatiotemporal movement in the visual language of mass-produced sculpture through mathematical calculations and geometric reasoning based on cosmology expressed in tubular lines and movable objects (Mohammad et al., 2022). His writings would not possess the figurative text or symbols and therefore rely on a rigidly formal language to make cosmological concepts intelligible to people with different cultural backgrounds. The given form of interaction breaks both language and cultural barriers, which means that the popularisation of philosophical ideas achieved a significant level of development. It illustrates the increase in philosophical participation in media and cultural situations.

5.4 Commonality in Differences: The Eternal Quest for The Essence of Existence

Although artistic translations of Chinese and Western philosophy vary in terms of place, time, and form of intervention, they all address the subject of the essence of existence. Chinese literati painting investigates the interplay of nihility and existence via negative space; Impressionism captures present perception through light and shadow; and modern installation art develops the connectivity between subject and world through interaction. Regardless of the media or philosophical resources used, art continues on its journey to discover the essence of existence and the authenticity of life through perceptual methods.

6 CONCLUSION

Looking through the history of creative translation in Chinese and Western philosophy, it may reach a fundamental conclusion: philosophical conceptions are the generative core of artistic creation and an infinite source of inspiration for art, rather than simply external contributions to artistic production. This core has endless vitality, capable of sustaining spiritual depth while constantly merging into other cultures, times, and mediums, resulting in reconstruction in different artistic forms.

From the negative space of Chinese literati painting to the void of contemporary installation art, and from the light and shadow of Impressionism to the embodied nature of installation art, the artistic translation of philosophical concepts reveals three distinct pathways. On the spiritual level, it serves as a vehicle for the individual's inner spirit to participate in discourse with the universe (such as the Qi generated by brushwork and negative space in literati painting). On the sensory dimension, it acts as a link between the body and the outside world (such as embodied perception in Impressionist paintings). On the social dimension, it serves as a conduit for public discourse (such as the juxtaposition of various temporal-spatial and cultural elements in contemporary installations). These three routes have not been

lost in the passage of time, nor have they been isolated in their distinct growth. Instead, they have intermingled to establish a complex network of connections between philosophy and art, allowing philosophy to engage with art on a more profound level.

As technology progresses and multiculturalism spreads, creative translations of philosophical concepts will become increasingly diverse. Regardless of how forms and media evolve, the core of philosophy's intervention in art remains basically an attempt by humans to observe the universe and investigate the meaning of existence. This attempt combines a deep grasp of traditional philosophy with a sympathetic approach to social challenges. Only then can philosophy genuinely become the soul of art, and art may take the shape of philosophy's perceptual embodiment. The two are linked, similar to the Taoist concept of the interdependence of nihility and existence, continuously stretching the limits of human experience of the world and increasing the horizons of human cognition.

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