

# Exploring the Characteristics of Zen Painting

Jin-Shan Shen, Yu-Meng Xiao, Chih-Long Lin\*

Graduate School of Creative Industry Design, National Taiwan University of Arts, New Taipei City

Email: 404232104@qq.com, xiaoyuumeng@163.com, \*cl.lin@ntua.edu.tw

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## Abstract

Since Zen Buddhism was introduced to China from India by Bodhidharma during the Northern and Southern Dynasties, it had been through twists and turns with a slow growth. Over centuries of development, it had matured. Under the influence of Zen Buddhism, Chinese painters through the axis of history saw changes in their style of works. As a consequence, there was a profound impact on the future generations. During the Southern Song Dynasty, Chinese Zen ink painting also spread to Japan. What is interesting is that Zen Buddhism's impact can be found in Japanese culture and art as well as in all aspects of daily life. In modern times, Zen was introduced to the West by the Japanese Zen master D.T. Suzuki, which has a great impact on the entire modern art movement. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the characteristics of Zen painting. Through semi-structured interviews with nine experts, including scholars, Zen masters, and artists, the research shows the main characteristics of Zen painting are represented by elegance, simplicity, spirituality, imagery, serenity, and transcendence. The model built in this thesis provides a reference for creators to convey their ideas via the paintings as they are creating as well as for the viewers to understand the artist's intended meanings, which enables the viewers to not only understand the theme of the works and but also feel the essence of Zen.

## Keywords

Zen, Zen Painting, Expert Interviews, Zen Spirit, Zen Culture

## 1. Introduction

As a form of abstract expression of artistic conception, Zen features a unique cultural and way of thinking. It is dedicated to advocating equality and focuses on cultivating the spiritual essence of individual. Sometimes, it would even pursue a harmonious and relaxed lifestyle by neglecting the material. Such lifestyle centers around purity, solitude, tranquility, and simplicity as its core values (Lin

& Hu, 2021). Since Bodhidharma introduced Zen from India to China during the Northern and Southern Dynasties, it had been through twists and turns with a gradual growth. By the mid-Tang dynasty, the direct involvement of scholars in innovating Zen theories and practices significantly enhanced its societal influence, culminating in the rise of Huineng's Southern School of Zen, which marked the full bloom of Zen in China. In 1246, during the Southern Song period, Lanxi Daolong brought the Linji School of Zen to Japan, and by the early 20th century, D.T. Suzuki introduced it to the West. The Zen propagated by Suzuki was not only a worldview philosophy but also an accessible and popular philosophy of life, facilitating with its global dissemination. Zen is unique not only in philosophy and practice but also in its integration into local culture, giving rise to a new look and mutual effect as it spreads worldwide. In China, Zen's impact is primarily evident in literature, painting, and calligraphy; in Japan, it extends to tea ceremony, flower arranging, architecture, landscaping, and even hot spring and culinary cultures (Wu, 1992). In the West, Zen primarily attracted psychologists, psychiatrists, certain sociologists and philosophers, artists, and emerging small religious groups, reflecting a remedy for the spiritual crisis triggered by the highly developed material civilization (Du & Wei, 2007). Zen is not just a philosophy of life and a unique way of thinking but also a profound engagement with life and spirituality, advocating complete freedom of the mind, unfettered by material and form. With the development and enrichment of Chinese Zen culture, it has had a profound impact on music, literature, and painting.

The emergence of Zen painting comes from a fusion of Indian Zen Buddhism with Chinese local cultural thought. Since Wang Wei pioneered Zen painting during the Tang Dynasty, a group of literati and scholars who incorporated Confucian and Daoist ideologies had applied Zen to painting. Such integration has made Zen painting an essential component and essence of Chinese traditional culture and Eastern philosophy, offering educational significance and moral guidance (Helen et al., 2018). Zen painting conveys the path of Zen through brush and ink, where creators, through Zen enlightenment, infused their works with unique imagery and expressive techniques to embody Zen thought and philosophy. Historically, Chinese Zen artists include Shi Ke from the Five Dynasties, Liang Kai and Muqi from the Song Dynasty, and Yintuoluo from the Yuan Dynasty, while Japan boasts artists like Sesshu Toyo and Hakuin Ekaku (Wu, 1992). In the modern art world, Japanese Zen artists include Hakuin Ekaku, Shiraga Kazuo, and Murakami Saburo; in the West, artists influenced by Zen include Yves Klein, Giger, Mark Tobey, Ad Reinhardt, and Jean Degottex (Helen et al., 2018).

The history of Zen painting is rich and varied, with different forms and artistic expressions emerging in different eras. The expression of Zen in Chinese Zen painting is built upon the foundation of literati's paintings, aiming to lead viewers to a state of enlightenment by often choosing natural scenery as subject matter. However, some contemporary works may only superficially present the ap-

pearance of Zen painting without a deep understanding of its true meaning, or merely utilize elements of Zen on the surface, with little Zen spirit (Chen, 2013). Thus, how to create a painting imbued with Zen spirit becomes an important issue. From the artist's perspective, there should be a shift from subjective creation to objective creation centered around the viewers, with a focus on the viewer's perspective in order to better understand the characteristics of Zen painting.

The encoding by the artist and the decoding by the viewers are part of the artistic creation process (Barthes, 1977; Fiske, 2010; Jakobson, 1987). Exploring into the cognitive process of artistic creation from the perspective of the viewers' decoding helps to deeply understand the artist's journey of creation (Lin & Li, 2015; Beatty & Ball, 2011). As early as the 4th century, during the Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties, Xie He in "The Classification of Painters" proposed the "Six Principles," emphasizing the liveliness of spirit, the use of brushwork, form following the object, category-oriented color, spatial organization, and adaptation in copying. Artistic creation revolves around three main stages: experience, conception, and communication. Firstly, artists experience and interact with their surroundings and life, which fuels their inspiration. Then, during emotional excitement, they conceive ideas through imagination, and finally, they transfer these artistic expressions onto the canvas, displaying concrete creative outcomes (Tong, 2014). The artist used to be central to artistic creation which neglects the perspective of the viewer. Thus, there is the inability to fully convey the deeper meaning of the artwork. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to enrich the understanding and creation of Zen painting by analyzing the characteristics of Zen painting from the literature and exploring into the key features in Zen painting through expert interviews.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. The Development of Zen

Originating from the Sanskrit word "dhyāna", Zen Buddhism signifies attaining a state of deep contemplation that is tranquil and serene through meditative practice, with a focus on inner peace and wise thinking. It represents an individual's profound attention to life and mind, advocating complete freedom of the mind (Zhang, 2004; Du & Wei, 2007). Zen was introduced to China during the Southern and Northern Dynasties by Bodhidharma, who is regarded as the founder of Zen Buddhism. After being transmitted and developed through the Eastern Mountain's Fifth Patriarch, Zen had basically taken shape in China, where the Fifth Patriarch Hongren passed Zen to Huineng and Shenxiu, thereby forming two major schools of the North and South. Advocated by the Sixth Patriarch Huineng, Southern Zen centered around concepts such as "sudden enlightenment" and "no fixed method", becoming the mainstream development of Chinese Zen Buddhism (Wu, 1992). Subsequently, Zen spread rapidly, forming three genres, namely the "Heze Shenhui", "Qingyuan Xingsi", and "Nanyue

Huairang”, which further evolved into the “Five Houses and Seven Schools”, establishing Zen as a major religious faction in China (Zhang, 2011).

Zen Buddhism was introduced to Japan around 1192, at a time when Chinese Zen had already matured. While Japan was entering the Kamakura period. During this period, Japan’s emerging samurai class actively sought religious support distinct from the one in the past, which facilitated with the comprehensive development of Zen in Japan. The Rinzaï and Soto schools, introduced to Japan by Eisai and Dogen respectively, were among the early sects of Japanese Zen. This led to Zen penetrating deeply into all aspects of Japanese life and social culture, making Zen an integral part of Japanese culture (Zhang, 2013; Xie, 2010).

In the early 20th century, Zen Buddhism was introduced to the West from Japan, primarily through the efforts of D.T. Suzuki with his work “Zen and Japanese Culture,” which made Zen’s way into Europe and America. Suzuki’s accessible explanations of Zen along with the efforts of Kyoto School scholars elevated Zen to international prominence in philosophy and religion. Scholars like Shin’ichi Hisamatsu further propagated Zen philosophy and art through publications such as “The Philosophy of the Tea Ceremony” and “Zen and Art.” After World War II, Western countries, facing social and spiritual crises after rapid developments in material civilization, found Zen’s irrationality and anti-scientific spirit responsive to the needs of Western society at the time. As a result, Zen had been through special development in countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, and France (Wu, 1992). The spread of Zen not only promoted its global recognition and acceptance but also facilitated Zen’s interaction and integration with local cultures, creating a unique cultural phenomenon.

## 2.2. Zen Painting

The term “Zen painting” or “zenga” in English corresponds to the Chinese term “禪繪畫”, referring to a category of painting. As a form of art, painting encompasses drawing and fine arts. Zen painting is characterized by its “Zen flavor” or Zen-like qualities. It is considered a form of painting that features the function of Zen meditation (Liu, 2020), utilizing artistic means to express one’s comprehension of Zen principles. This special form of painting emerged during the Southern Song dynasty. Ancient Chinese Zen philosophical ideas of enlightenment and profound insight are clearly conveyed in the simple strokes of Zen paintings. Zen paintings value spontaneous and serendipitous revelations and symbolism, aiming to convey implied meanings and unexpected images. Zen paintings often transcend the limitations of their subject matter, allowing the viewers to perceive beyond the painting itself, directly appealing to the human (Ke, 2015). A key characteristic of its expression lies in inspiration, intending to transform people’s daily lifestyles or experiences into philosophy, serving as a medium for deep contemplation and meditation (Yan, 2017).

As a distinctive style of painting, Zen painting embodies the essence of transcendence, simplicity, and detachment, permeating the “Zen” ambiance. This is

the essence of “Zen painting,” which emphasizes the expression of spontaneous actions as well as direct and intense feelings. Zen paintings are characterized by their simplicity and profoundness, creating an ethereal and tranquil artistic conception. With concise brushwork, the painters convey the landscapes within their hearts through sparse strokes, with each dot and line reflecting the artist’s spiritual affirmation. Unbound by conventional methods, they find joy and amusement in their own creativity. In the painting lies Zen, and within Zen lies the painting, rolling Zen spirit, artistic realm, and poetic charm into one (Chen, 2007).

The historical origins of Zen painting can be traced back to the Tang Dynasty in China, where poetry, calligraphy, and painting began to be blended, forming a unique literati art style. Wang Wei is one of the early representatives of Zen painting in Tang Dynasty. His works display profound Zen meanings and delicate observations of nature. During the Five Dynasties and the Song Dynasty, Zen painting had been through further development. Painters made innovations in techniques and styles in addition to deepening the philosophical connotations and artistic expressiveness of Zen painting (Zhang, 2004). In the Yuan and Ming dynasties, there were a large number of outstanding Zen paintings, such as the works of Ni Zan and Dong Qichang, which showcased the zenith of Zen painting (Chen, 2013) as Zen painting continued to be influenced by Zen thought. Zen painting not only has a rich developmental history in China but also found its inheritance and innovations being made in Japan. After Zen was introduced to Japan in the 12th century, Zen painting gradually developed into one with a unique Japanese style. Particularly, Sesshu Toyo introduced the Chinese technique of ink wash painting to Japan in the 14th century, which had a profound impact on Japanese Zen painting. Subsequently, Japanese Zen painting continued to evolve and formed a distinctive artistic school (Helen et al., 2018).

By the 20th century, the concepts and techniques of Zen painting began to influence modern art in Europe and America with the cultural exchange between the East and the West. Artists like John Cage and Rupprecht Geiger were inspired by Zen painting, incorporating Zen elements into their works and showcasing the charm of cross-cultural exchange in Zen painting. Zen painting is not only a form of art but also a method of philosophical contemplation and spiritual practice. Its minimalist, transcendent aesthetic qualities and profound philosophical implications have attracted the attention of artists and art enthusiasts worldwide (Helen et al., 2018).

As a fusion of art and philosophy, Zen painting not only reflects Zen Buddhism’s profound understanding of life and nature but also showcases humanity’s relentless pursuit of essence, truth and beauty. Since the Tang Dynasty, the transmission and development of Zen painting through both time and space have continually enriched the world’s art treasury, becoming a spiritual link connecting different cultures and eras.

### 2.3. Orientation of Zen Painting

This study has organized materials related to Zen and Zen painting, including

books and journal articles, and has categorized the characteristics of Zen painting into three aspects: style, artistic conception, and spirit. Firstly, in terms of style, Zen painting is the product of the painter's sudden enlightenment of Zen and the understanding of the essence of life, similar to Zen poetry, which presents the realization of life's themes. The content and form of Zen painting are unified, constituting a style of painting (Sun, 2010). Zen painting is considered to have a function of participating in Zen meditation, with a relatively consistent style, featuring lighter ink colors, including various pigments; the composition is simple and sparse, leaving a lot of blank space and often being free of seals or signatures (Liu, 2020). It is an important category in China's development history, characterized by a consistent style, primarily using ink with lighter colors, and occasionally employing minerals like ochre, cinnabar, and white powder; the painting is simplistic, employing different ink and brush techniques such as outline drawing, reduced brushwork, ink splashing, folded reed outlining, and boneless painting (Li, 2017). Zen paintings are mostly completed in light ink and watercolor. What sets them apart from traditional coloring techniques lies in integrating ink and Zen thought, using reduced brushwork and ink splashing techniques (Zhou, 2017). The splashing technique simplifies the forms of characters or objects, emphasizing the expression of the creator's subjective emotions (Yan, 2017). Zen painting features concise but sufficient brushwork, with bold and decisive strokes, direct slashing, side-splitting, and simplified sketching (Liu, 2020), focusing on the main subject, with other elements, if present, concentrated around the main subject without disturbing the rest of the blank space; additionally, the main subject is often placed in the lower middle part of the drawing, leaving a large amount of blank space above (Cheng, 2020). The rhythm of the painting lines reflects the rhythm of life's fluctuations, with the lines conveying strength and rhythm. From this, it can be concluded that the stylistic aspect includes five characteristics: elegance, splashing, simplicity, spaciousness, and concentration.

Additionally, in terms of artistic conception, the integration of "imagery types" in the composition and the full use of reduced brushwork reflect the essential characteristics of the subjects depicted, allowing the emotions the artist intends to convey in the painting to be more directly infused into the work (Yan, 2017). Zen painting conveys profound connotations and a transcendent realm, serene and sublime with just a few strokes. The scenes are vast and silent, simple yet everlasting, distant yet flavorful, and transcendently detached from the mundane (Zhang, 2017). Zen art can help purify the outlines of objects and simplify the composition in paintings. In creating Zen paintings, artists are required to dispel distractions, aiming to purify the mind and achieve the highest state of spiritual transcendence (Qiu, 2021; Shi & Yue, 2022). The spirituality in Zen painting, where "emptiness" suggests that the painting should not cling to external constraints but should reflect a detachment from material and utilitarian burdens under the influence of the concept of "emptiness," expressing a settled

mind. “Spirituality” emphasizes the human spirit, the core idea of Zen’s self-mind and self-nature (Cai, 2021). Deeply rooted in Zen thought, Zen paintings naturally possess a spiritual implication (Qiu, 2021), embodying the serene aesthetic of Zen and emphasizing the expression of the soul, with contemplation and expression of the spirit at its core (Chen, 2013). Zen paintings can escape from worldly pollution, see the true nature, and thus enjoy the delight of understanding Zen thought, “Zen joy,” leading to a detached spirit and viewing worldly life with equanimity, reflecting a transcendent, serene, and free artistic conception (Qian & Xue, 2021). Therefore, the artistic conception aspect includes five characteristics: imagery, tranquility, purification, spirituality and detachment.

Finally, in terms of the spiritual dimension, Zen painting often represents a chance for enlightenment. It is a product of the artist’s sudden enlightenment on the essence of life, with its transcendence manifested in the playful use of ink and brush to explore the truth, containing philosophical thoughts, and achieving a broad and profound realm (Qiu, 2021). Zen painting values sudden and serendipitous revelations and symbols, seeking the meaning beyond words and the unexpected imagery (Ke, 2015). Its key characteristic is enlightenment, transforming everyday life or experience into philosophy, serving as a carrier for deep contemplation and quiet enlightenment (Yan, 2017). Zen transcends specific objects and emotions in leap-like associative thinking, allowing people to feel a kind of emotion that is hard to feel at other times, and to understand a kind of philosophy that is hard to grasp (Ke, 2015). Zen painting aims to stimulate the ability to cultivate oneself, and surpass ordinary people to attain the realm of saints and sages (Qiu, 2021). Creators often pursue lofty intellectual enlightenment and spiritual elevation, returning to the way through Zen thought, resulting in paintings that are vast and serene, simple and plain, distant yet flavorful, and transcendently detached from the mundane (Yan, 2017). Thus, the spiritual aspect includes six characteristics: serendipity, transcendence, enlightenment, inspiration, surpassing, and sublimity.

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1. Selection of Respondents

In this study, nine experts are invited for interviews, including three scholars with over five years of research experience in Zen or Zen art, three Zen masters with more than ten years of Zen practice, and three artists with over five years of experience in Zen art creation, the diverse backgrounds of these experts ensure a well-rounded exploration of Zen painting from multiple perspectives, enhancing the study’s depth and breadth, as shown in **Table 1**. Furthermore, the selection criteria for the eight Zen paintings analyzed in this study were rooted in a desire to span a broad historical and cultural spectrum, reflecting the evolution and cross-cultural influence of Zen painting. Each painting was chosen based on its significance within the Zen art tradition, its ability to exemplify the core principles

**Table 1.** Basic data of experts interviewed.

Expert Identity	Number	Age	Education	Background
Scholar	A1	65	Graduate	30 years of teaching experience in art courses, 8 years of related Zen research.
	A2	49	Doctor	15 years of teaching experience in art theory, 12 years of related Zen research.
	A3	55	Graduate	20 years of teaching experience in art history courses, 10 years of related Zen research.
Zen master	B1	35	Graduate	Practiced Zen Buddhism for 10 years, currently practicing at Nanputuo Temple in Fujian, with a special interest in Zen painting, has participated in multiple art exchange events, sharing the deep connection between Zen meditation and art.
	B2	44	Bachelor	Practiced Zen Buddhism for 10 years, skilled in Zen painting, believes that paintings can reflect the mindset of Zen meditation, and has displayed his paintings several times within the temple.
	B3	54	High School	Practiced Zen Buddhism for 30 years, long-term study of the integration of Zen Buddhism and art.
Artist	C1	38	Doctor	Over 20 years of experience in Chinese painting creation, with more than 30 related Zen painting works.
	C2	52	Bachelor	Engaged in contemporary art creation for 32 years, with more than 10 Zen concept art installations.
	C3	48	Bachelor	Engaged in lacquer painting creation for 30 years, with more than 20 Zen painting works.

of Zen, and its contribution to the dialogue between Zen philosophy and artistic expression across different eras and regions.

### 3.2. Interview Method and Interview Outline

This study aims to analyze and extract the characteristics of Zen painting through an in-depth exploration into Zen and its expression in the art of painting. For this purpose, semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted using video calls, with each session lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes. The interviews were recorded and detailed notes were made to gain a deep understanding of the qualities of Zen painting. The interviews revolved around two main themes: firstly, the analysis of Zen and its characteristics in painting; secondly, a detailed analysis of specific Zen paintings. The selected works span a long timeframe from the Tang dynasty to the present, including works from the Tang, Five Dynasties, Song, Ming, Qing dynasties, and the 20th century, reflecting the characteristics of Zen painting evolving over time and offering its reflection of different historical cultural backgrounds. Besides the works from China, there are some works by contemporary Western artists. These works deliver a demonstration of the international influence of Zen thought and painting expression. In selecting the eight Zen paintings for this study, special consideration was given to Zen's influence across time and geography. The artists chosen for these samples have each been impacted by Zen philosophy, regardless of their cultural or temporal context. This deliberate selection aims to illustrate the en-



during presence and evolution of Zen painting from ancient times to the present. By incorporating works from both Eastern and Western traditions, this study highlights the universal appeal and adaptability of Zen aesthetics, demonstrating how Zen has inspired many artists beyond its traditional origins. The inclusion of modern and Western Zen paintings alongside ancient Eastern ones underlines the fluidity of Zen as a creative and spiritual force, transcending cultural and temporal boundaries. This approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of Zen painting, showcasing its relevance and application in diverse artistic contexts while maintaining a coherent analysis standard rooted in Zen's core philosophies. Each piece embodies the core philosophy of Zen in its unique way. They either express the concept of selflessness and unity through tranquil natural landscapes or convey the revelations and teachings of Zen through depictions of figures and animals. This variety of expressions shows that Zen painting is not just a visual art form but also a spiritual practice and philosophical exploration. The selection of these works also represents a dialogue on how Zen painting is understood, interpreted, and recreated across different cultures and eras. Whether they bear a traditional meaning or modern one, they come from the East or the West, these works showcase the universality and temporality of Zen painting, giving a reflection upon how it transcends geographical and temporal boundaries to become a global cultural practice. The interview outline is shown in [Table 2](#).








## 4. Results

In this phase, nine experts rated eight paintings based on the Zen painting characteristics summarized in [Table 2](#), covering aspects from style, artistic conception, and spirit, including characteristics such as elegance, splashing, simplicity, spaciousness, concentration, imagery, tranquility, purification, spirituality, detachment, serendipity, transcendence, enlightenment, inspiration, surpassing, and sublimity. The rating scale ranged from 1 to 10, where 1 represented the lowest evaluation and 10 the highest. Each expert independently assessed each piece of artwork, allowing for a comprehensive perspective and evaluation from different experts. Through this method, more representative and universal characteristics of Zen painting were extracted based on the collective insights and evaluations.

### 4.1. The Snow-Covered Riverscape of the Yangtze River

Experts' evaluations of "The Snow-Covered Riverscape of the Yangtze River" in terms of Zen painting characteristics are presented in [Figure 1](#). From the perspective of style, the painting's elegance received unanimous high praise from scholars, Zen masters, and artists, with an average score of 9.1. This elegance, seemingly related to the choice of colors and brushwork, presents an aesthetic pursuit of tranquility and detachment from the bustling world. The relatively lower score for splashing suggests the painting leans towards meticulous depiction

**Table 2.** Outline of the interview.

Category	Paintings	Description
Landscape		“The Snow-Covered Riverscape of the Yangtze River” by Wang Wei (Tang Dynasty) [Part 5] Dimensions: Height 28.8 cm, Width 449.3 cm Material: Color on silk
		“One of The Eight Views of Yan and Wu” by Dong Qichang (Ming Dynasty) Dimensions: Height 26.1 cm, Width 24.8 cm Material: Color on silk
Figures		“Adjusting the Mind by the Second Patriarch” by Shi Ke (Five Dynasties) [Part] Dimensions: Height 35.5 cm, Width 129 cm Material: Ink on paper
		“Huike Severing His Arm” by Xue Zhou Dengyang (15th Century) Dimensions: Height 27 cm, Width 24 cm Material: Ink on paper
Flowers and Birds Still Life		“Six Persimmons” by Muqi (Song Dynasty) Dimensions: Height 36.2 cm, Width 38.1 cm Material: Ink on paper
		“The Solitary Bird” by Zhu Da (Qing) Dimensions: Height 103.5 cm, Width 44 cm Material: Ink on paper
Abstract Geometry		“Nocturne” by Jinshan Ming (1992) Dimensions: Height 27.9 cm, Width 59.4 cm Material: Print

Continued



“Blue on Orange” by Rupprecht Geiger (1969) Dimensions: Height 71 cm, Width 66 cm  
Material: Color silkscreen print

1. Please share your thoughts on the Zen painting illustration mentioned above. From the style perspective, evaluate its conformity with the following five characteristics: elegance, splashing, simplicity, spaciousness, and concentration. Score each characteristic on a scale of 1 to 10 and provide explanations.
2. Please share your thoughts on the Zen painting illustration mentioned above. From the perspective of artistic conception, evaluate its conformity with the following five characteristics: imagery, tranquility, purification, spirituality and detachment. Score each characteristic on a scale of 1 to 10 and provide explanations.
3. Please share your thoughts on the Zen painting illustration mentioned above. From the spiritual perspective, evaluate its conformity with the following six characteristics: serendipity, transcendence, enlightenment, inspiration, surpassing, and sublimity. Score each characteristic on a scale of 1 to 10 and provide explanations.

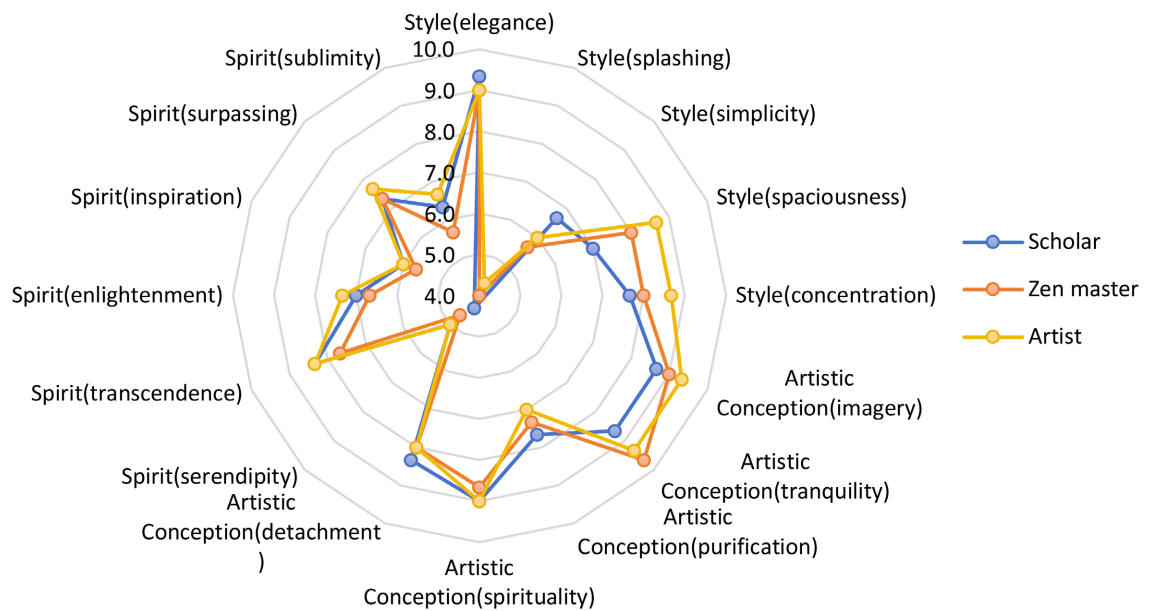


Figure 1. The Zen painting characteristics scoring results for “The Snow-Covered Riverscape of the Yangtze River”.

over bold strokes, closely tied to the restrained and subtle tradition of Zen painting. In terms of artistic conception, the scores for imagery and tranquility were notably high, attaining average scores of 9.0 and 9.2 respectively. This indicates the work’s success in conveying profound symbolic meanings and an inviting serene atmosphere, qualities particularly valued in Zen painting. The high score for tranquility reflects the painting’s exceptional ability to convey peace and inner harmony.

From the spiritual aspect, the high scores for transcendence and detachment further reveal the deep spiritual impact of “The Snow-Covered Riverscape of the Yangtze River.” This pertains not only to the theme or symbolic meaning of the

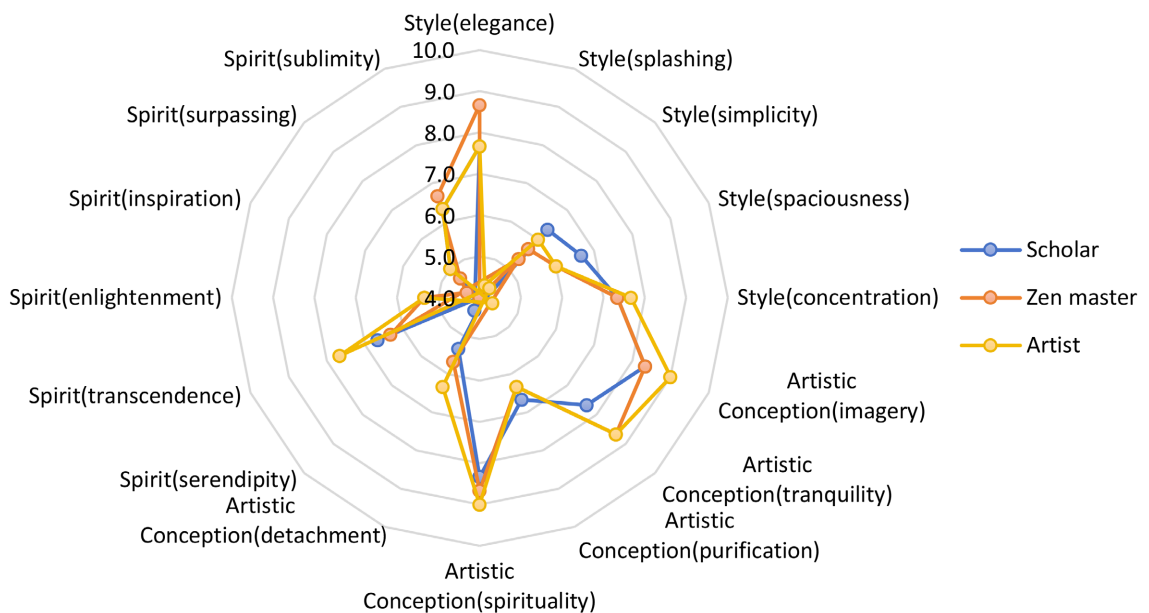
work but how it evokes a deeper understanding and reflection on life and the universe in viewers. Such spiritual elevation and transcendence are precisely the ultimate realms sought in Zen painting. These rating results show that the piece is not only visually captivating but also profound in its spiritual revelation.

The high evaluations of these characteristics not only reflect the experts' overall appreciation for the painting but also highlight its unique position in the realm of contemporary Zen painting. Scholar A1 noted, "The painting depicts the river surface and snow-covered mountains using gentle brushstrokes, exhibiting a beauty of elegance"; A2 commented, "The landscape in this painting is vivid, like a poem full of the beauty of imagery." Zen Master B1 viewed the painting as, "The lines and colors all present an elegance that calms the mind, much like a subdued poem. The painting successfully establishes a specific imagery through scenery and lines, allowing the viewers to immerse themselves."

Thus, "The Snow-Covered Riverscape of the Yangtze River" is not just visually pleasing but also a Zen painting of profound spiritual and philosophical significance. Through its elegant style, meticulous depiction, rich imagery, and tranquil atmosphere, the painting successfully conveys the inner peace and spiritual transcendence sought in Zen philosophy.

#### 4.2. The Eight Views of Yan and Wu

Experts evaluated the Zen painting characteristics of "The Eight Views of Yan and Wu" album, as shown in **Figure 2**, particularly highlighting its style of elegance, the artistic conception of imagery and ethereality, and the spiritual quality of transcendence, which received relatively high overall scores. The key style characteristic of elegance was prominently acknowledged in this work, scoring 8.0, reflecting a purified and restrained presentation in choice of color



**Figure 2.** The Zen painting characteristics scoring results for "The Eight Views of Yan and Wu".

and overall atmosphere. This style is crucial in Zen painting, not only for its aesthetic appeal but for its representation of the profound spiritual content conveyed by the artwork.

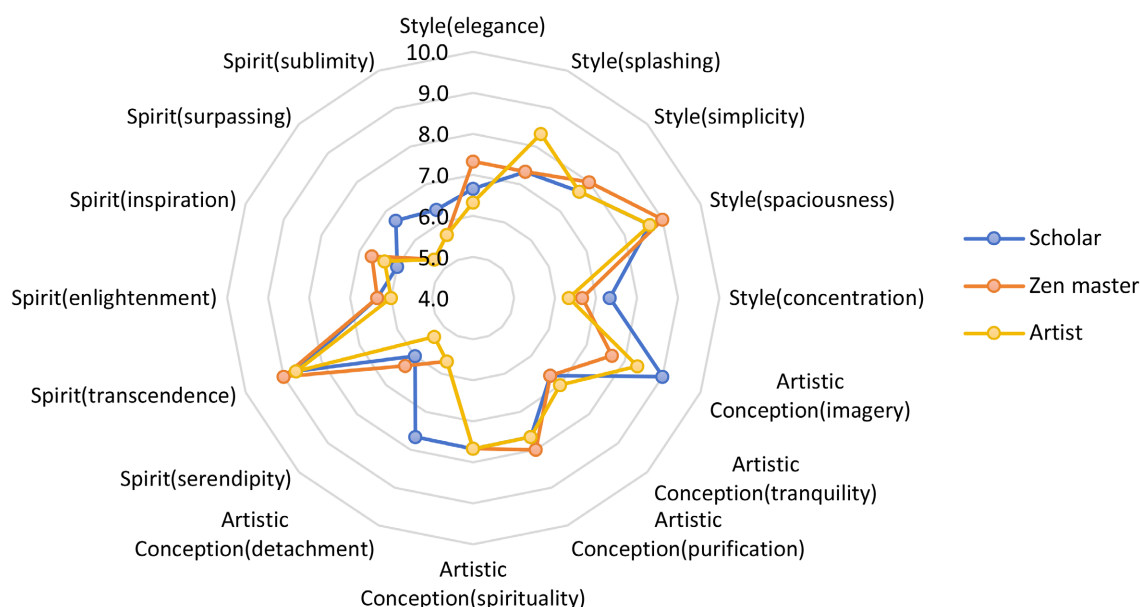
In terms of artistic conception, the scores of 8.6 for imagery and 8.7 for ethereality underscore the work's powerful ability to convey deep meanings and evoke emotional resonance in the viewers. The high score for ethereality, in particular, indicates the work's success in allowing the viewers to experience a state of mental purification beyond reality. These high scores reveal the painting's capacity to guide the viewers into a profound experience of Zen philosophy while providing a rich visual and emotional feast.

On the spiritual level, the score of 6.9 for transcendence shows that "The Eight Views of Yan and Wu" effectively guides the viewers away from worldly distractions towards higher realms. This quality is especially crucial in Zen painting, as it closely ties to the work's religious and philosophical foundations, symbolizing the spiritual freedom and liberation sought in Zen Buddhism. Zen Master B1 commented, "Looking at this landscape far away from the hustle and bustle of the human world, one cannot help but want to escape the mundane to find inner peace." B2 noted, "This painting displays an elegant style from its soft hues to its delicate brushwork, fully embodying this aspect." Artist C3 believed, "The colors in this painting are relatively soft, and the brushwork is very delicate, presenting an elegant atmosphere."

Thus, "The Eight Views of Yan and Wu" distinctly showcases artistic qualities of elegance. The landscapes, enveloped in mist, render the overall tone softness. Both the choice of colors and the application of brushwork demonstrate this delicate and soft characteristic, offering a visually pleasing experience. The extensive use of blank space and the ambiguous relationship between the mountains and waters contribute to a strong sense of ethereality. This technique combined with the light colors makes the overall painting depict a transcendent, spiritually expansive realm. This work not only visually exhibits the unique elegance, rich imagery, tranquility, and ethereality of Zen painting but also spiritually embodies detachment from the world. These qualities not only deepen our understanding of the artistic style of Zen painting but also enhance the cultural and spiritual value of the work as an expression of Zen art.

### 4.3. Adjusting the Mind by the Second Patriarch

Experts assessed the Zen painting characteristics of "Adjusting the Mind by the Second Patriarch" as shown in **Figure 3**. Its style for simplicity and spaciousness, the artistic conception for imagery, and the spirituality for transcendence all have received notable comprehensive evaluations. In terms of style, a high score of 8.8 for simplicity and spaciousness reflects the artwork's refined composition and thoughtful spatial arrangement, which is focused on Zen painting's unique perspective on the art of leaving space. This design strategy not only clearly represents the work's aesthetic style but also brings a visual tranquility, opening vast spaces for imagination and introspection for the viewers.



**Figure 3.** The Zen painting characteristics scoring results for “Adjusting the Mind by the Second Patriarch”.

For artistic conception, imagery received a high score of 8.3, showcasing the work’s excellent ability to convey deep themes and emotional expressions. Through delicate brushwork and profound composition, a philosophical spiritual world is crafted, affirming the work’s success in conveying the philosophical concepts and emotional depth of Zen Buddhism. Spiritually, a high score of 8.8 for transcendence indicates the work’s achievement in urging the viewers to escape from daily life in search of higher spiritual levels. This characteristic is the essence of Zen painting, not just an aspect of artistic expression but also embodying the core pursuit of Zen spirituality.

According to interview content, Scholar A1 stated, “The blank space highlights the relationship between the monk and his surroundings, showing the painting’s simplicity. Although it doesn’t reach the ultimate sense of spirituality, it still provides a simple and tranquil feeling.” Zen Master B2 believed, “Through the image of the monk, the painting creates an artistic conception of Zen and enlightenment. This conception is vivid and profound, prompting further contemplation and association with Buddhist Zen philosophy.” Zen Master B3 commented, “The simplicity of the painting transcends worldly chaos. “Adjusting the Mind by the Second Patriarch” conveys a serene and profound spiritual realm. The figures and scenery in the painting seem isolated from the material world’s hustle and bustle, displaying a transcendent attitude.”

Thus, “Adjusting the Mind by the Second Patriarch” not only exhibits the unique aesthetic of Zen Buddhism in its artistic form but also offers a profound enlightenment on the spiritual and philosophical levels for the viewers. With its style of simplicity, thoughtful imagery, and promotion of introspection, the work successfully crafts a spiritual realm beyond the trivialities of daily life, guiding viewers into a quiet and profound inner world. The viewers are invited

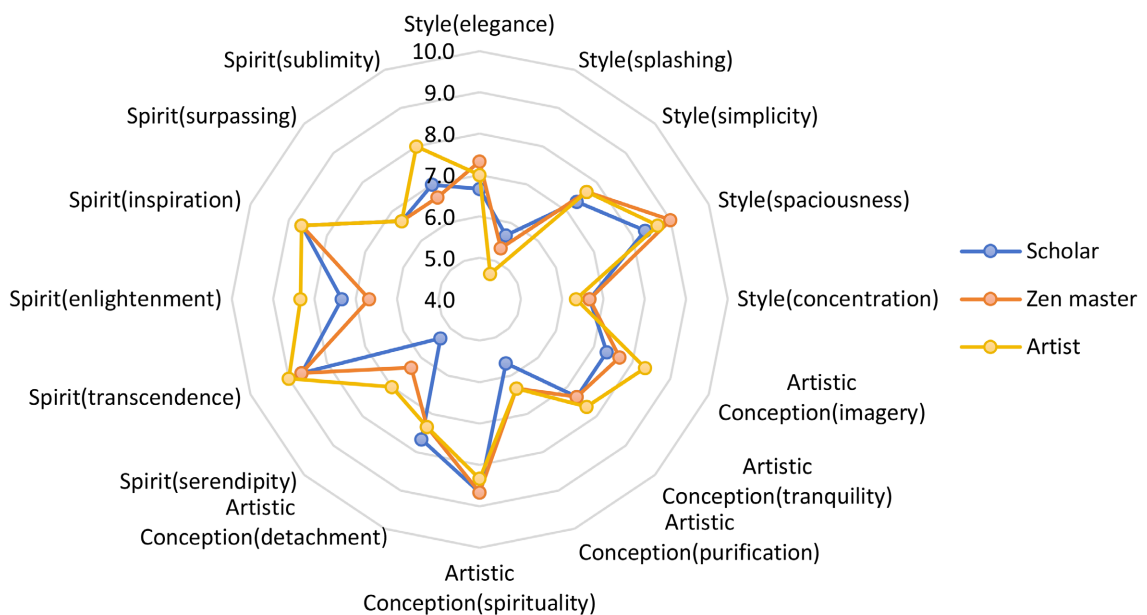
to explore into the deep philosophical thoughts of Zen, experiencing the unique insights into the relationship between humans and nature, and the one between the spiritual and material worlds. This painting is not just a visual treat but a spiritual journey, using art to connect and understand the core spirit of Zen, seeking inner peace and transcendence.

#### 4.4. Huike Severing His Arm

Experts rated the Zen painting characteristics of “Huike Severing His Arm” as revealed in **Figure 4**, where the style’s simplicity and spaciousness led with a high score of 8.7. This result showcases the artwork’s excellence in open composition and minimalist aesthetics, celebrating the unique art of leaving space and the clever use of space in Zen painting. The high appreciation for simplicity and spaciousness not only provides visual enjoyment but also brings a tranquil atmosphere emotionally, offering viewers ample space for contemplation.

In the spiritual dimension, transcendence scored highly at 8.8, indicating the work’s significant impact on encouraging the viewers to transcend daily reality and explore into deeper spiritual pursuits. The high score for transcendence reveals the artist’s deep exploration into the essence of life and the pursuit of spiritual freedom beyond the material world. Similarly, inspiration also scored highly at 8.7, demonstrating this work’s potential to provoke deep thought and inspire the viewers, perfectly speaking to the intrinsic nature of Zen painting to promote inner reflection and spiritual exploration.

Interview content includes Scholar A3’s view: “The use of blank space in the painting presents a sense of spirituality. Although there is relatively less blank space, its appropriate use enhances the sense of space and composition of the work, providing the viewers with more imaginative space and adding depth to



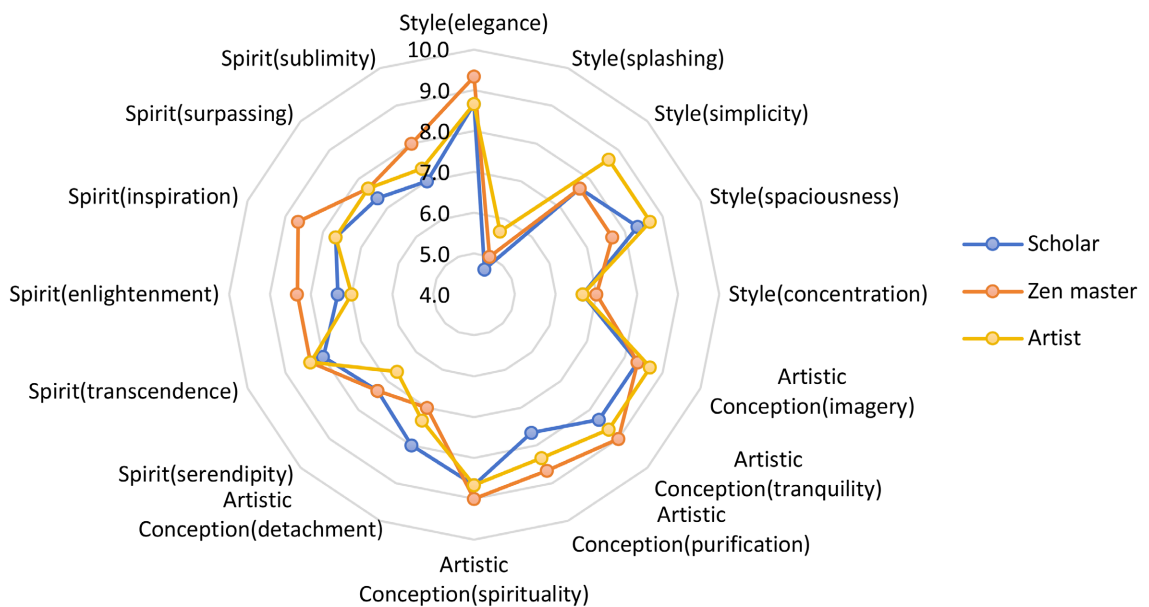
**Figure 4.** The Zen painting characteristics scoring results for “Huike Severing His Arm”.

the painting.” Zen Master B1 stated: “Huike Severing His Arm” portrays a realm that transcends materiality and pursues spiritual freedom. This transcendence is not only material but also a spiritual transcendence, offering a feeling of detachment from the everyday.” Artist C2 remarked: “This painting is not just an artistic display but also a revelation of faith and spirituality. It inspires people to pursue truth and to deeply contemplate Dharma and life, having a significant inspirational effect on the viewers.”

Thus, the Zen painting “Huike Severing His Arm” not only achieves a high standard in artistic technique but, more importantly, conveys profound enlightenment on the spiritual and philosophical levels to the viewers. Through its style of simplicity and spaciousness, the painting not only provides a visually refreshing enjoyment for the viewers but, more importantly, evokes an inner peace beyond the turmoil of daily life. The high scores for transcendence and inspiration further indicate that this work successfully encourages the viewers to engage in deep reflection and explore into a deeper understanding of life, existence, and spiritual freedom beyond the material world. With its minimalist yet profound style and the deep philosophy contained within, the painting becomes an important medium for guiding people in inner exploration and spiritual practice.

#### 4.5. Six Persimmons

Experts evaluated the Zen painting characteristics of “Six Persimmons” as presented in **Figure 5**. In terms of style, the elegance received a high score of 8.9, showcasing the work’s precision and restraint in color selection and brush application. This reflects the artist’s pursuit of harmony and natural authenticity. Similarly, the spaciousness scored 8.2, highlighting the generous and open layout and spatial treatment, with a focus on the artwork’s emotional depth through its



**Figure 5.** The Zen painting characteristics scoring results for “Six Persimmons”.



use of space.

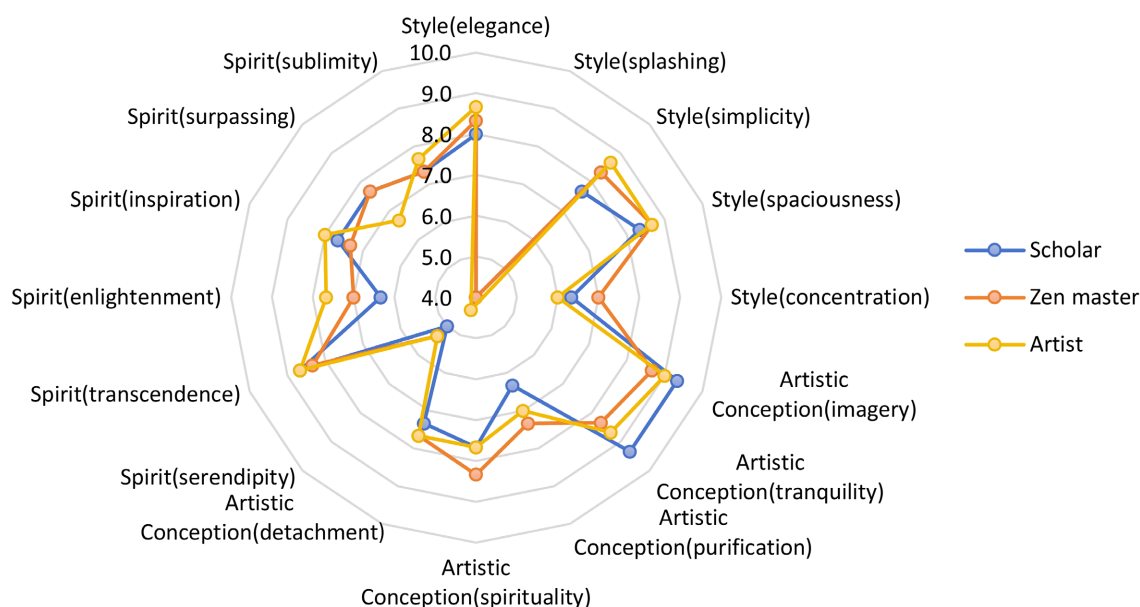
In the realm of artistic conception, tranquility and spirituality scored high at 8.7 and 8.8, respectively, indicating experts' high regard for the work's ability to create an atmosphere of peace and transcendence. These qualities enhance the viewer's sense of inner peace and spiritual exploration, further celebrating Zen painting's unique ability to convey profound philosophical thought and emotional expression. Spiritual dimension scores also revealed the work's deep philosophical pursuits, with transcendence and inspirationality scoring 8.2 and 8.0, noting the work's significant effect on encouraging viewers' spiritual transcendence and intellectual inspiration.

Interview insights include Scholar A3's opinion: "The brushwork of this painting gives birth to extreme simplicity. Muqi captured the form and texture of the persimmons with the simplest, most direct strokes, which not only demonstrates his exquisite skill but also highlights the natural beauty of the persimmons." Artist C1 mentioned: "In 'Six Persimmons', the use of blank space is perfectly executed. The extensive use of blank space not only makes the persimmons the focal point but also gives the work a spiritual beauty. This blank space technique also provides the viewers with imaginative space, allowing them to interpret the work in the way they want." C2 observed: "The overall painting exudes a feeling of calm and serenity. This tranquility comes not only from the blank background and the brushwork of the persimmons but also from the overall harmony and balance of the painting. Although some critics believe the sense of tranquility is somewhat weak, the overall effect still conveys a profound beauty."

Thus, "Six Persimmons" exhibits a prominent feature of elegance. The persimmons and background complement each other, with chosen colors that are elegantly muted to highlight the texture of the persimmons while maintaining overall harmony. In Muqi's work, this elegance is at its peak, successfully avoiding complicated details to focus on the essence of the persimmons. The painting's technique of leaving blank spaces and its overall compositional design exhibit a strong sense of spirituality. This spirituality is not only manifested in the blank areas of the painting but also integrated into the depiction of the persimmons, creating a simple yet transcendent aesthetic experience.

#### 4.6. The Solitary Bird

Experts evaluated the Zen painting characteristics of "The Solitary Bird" as shown in **Figure 6**. From a stylistic perspective, the elegance led with a score of 8.3, highlighting the work's pursuit of simplicity and natural beauty. The relatively low score of 3.9 for splashiness may reflect the work's restrained and cautious style, speaking to the Zen painting tradition of "wuwei" or non-action. The scores of 8.2 for simplicity and 8.6 for spaciousness show the artist's mastery in using concise yet powerful strokes and spatial aesthetics. The medium score of 6.4 for contemplativeness might reflect the work's introspective and profound emotional expression.



**Figure 6.** The Zen painting characteristics scoring results for “The Solitary Bird”.

In the realm of artistic conception, high scores for imagery and tranquility, at 9.0 and 8.8 respectively, highlight the work’s profound content and serene atmosphere, core values pursued in Zen painting. Scores of 7.9 for spirituality and 7.6 for modesty further underscore the work’s embodiment of transcendence and a return to simplicity.

Spiritually, transcendence scored 8.6, underscoring the work’s pursuit of values beyond the mundane. Scores for insight at 7.0, inspirationality at 7.7, transcendence at 7.3, and sublimity at 7.4 indicate the work’s effectiveness in promoting self-reflection and spiritual elevation among the viewers.

Interview insights include Scholar A2’s comment: “With minimal strokes, the painter successfully portrays the bird’s form in “The Solitary Bird”, demonstrating simple yet detailed painting technique. This approach of conveying form and emotion with simple strokes is the best proof of the painter’s concise style.” Scholar A3 observed: “The painting’s lines show delicate characteristics, maintaining a low-key tone, forming an elegant style. This style is reflected in the painting’s color and brushwork, as well as the contrast between the background’s whitespace and the dark color of the bird. This elegant yet focused painting style successfully conveys the bird’s solitude and dignity.” Zen Master B1 mentioned: “The image of the bird in the painting, as the main subject, conveys an image of solitude and contemplation, almost representing a sense of loneliness or waiting. This emotional presentation leaves a profound impression on the viewers, prompting deep thought.” Artist C1 noted: “The extensive use of blank space along with the bird’s solitary posture creates a serene and profound feeling. The overall impression of the painting is tranquil, quiet, and peaceful, all stemming from the perfect combination of whitespace and quietness by the painter.” Artist C3 stated: “Through the simple style and lack of elaborate decoration, the painting exhibits a detached, worldly sentiment. This transcendental presentation al-

lows one to experience the painting’s transcendent realm.”

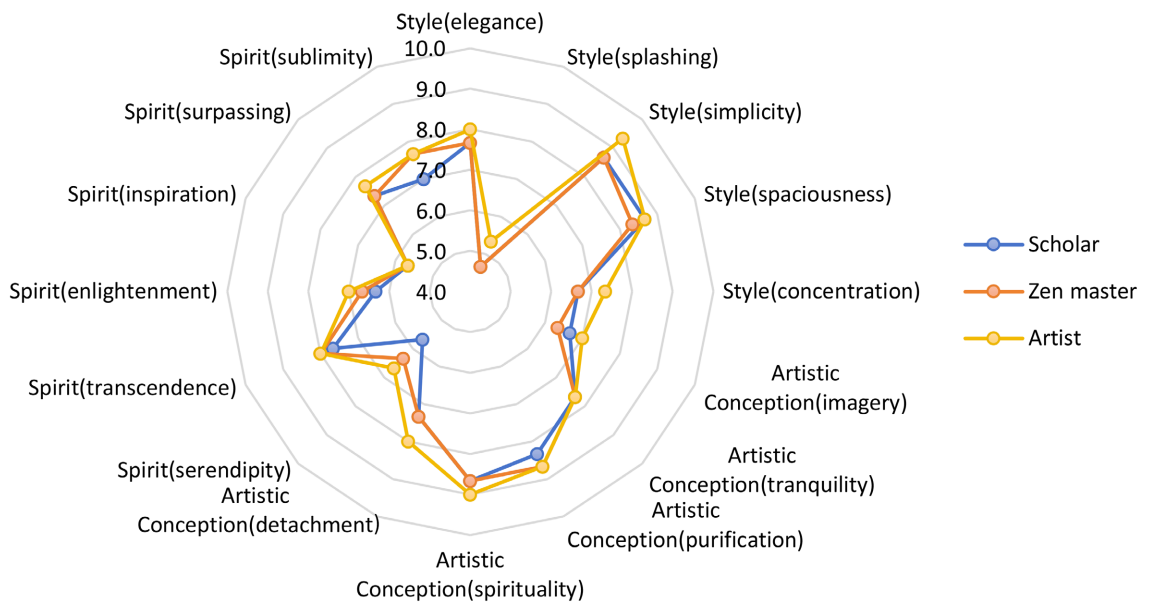
Thus, through its minimalist yet profound artistic techniques, this painting offers the viewers a unique visual and emotional experience. The painter’s use of concise lines and colors along with the skillful application of whitespace successfully conveys the form, emotion, and realm of the solitary bird, making the painting not just a visual piece but also a touch to the soul and a resonance of the spirit.

#### 4.7. Nocturne

The evaluation of the Zen painting “Nocturne” by experts, as shown in **Figure 7**, revealed that the style’s elegance scored 7.8, which indicates the work’s restrained use of color and brushwork, embodying a pursuit of tranquility and pure aesthetics. Meanwhile, simplicity and spaciousness scored 8.9 and 8.6 respectively, highlighting the artist’s mastery in form and spatial layout. From the perspective of artistic conception, the relatively lower score of 6.7 for imagery may reflect the work’s subtlety and restraint in visual communication, while a solid score of 7.7 for tranquility emphasizes the serene atmosphere created by the work. A high score of 8.8 for spirituality underscores the broad spiritual significance of the work, implying it is not only a visual art expression but also a guide to the viewers’ inner self.

On the spiritual level, a high score of 7.9 for transcendence reveals the work’s exploration into transcending daily trivialities and pursuing spiritual liberation. Although the score for inspirationality was relatively low at 5.7, it implies potential for further development in promoting the viewers’ self-reflection and spiritual enlightenment.

In interviews, Scholar A2 commented, “The work’s minimalist style and detachment from the world showcase its transcendence, transporting the viewers



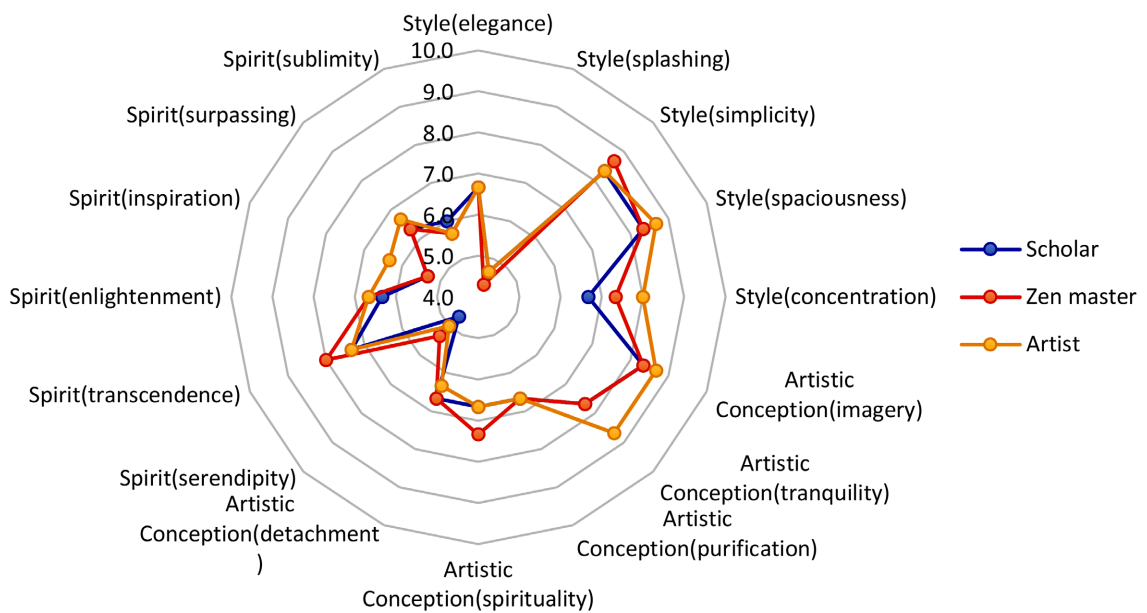
**Figure 7.** The Zen painting characteristics scoring results for “Nocturne”.

to a space beyond the everyday, isolated from worldly chaos. This atmosphere of detachment is primarily conveyed through the lines and color used in the painting.” Artist C1 believes, “Nocturne” uses extremely refined lines to depict the vibration of sound, a simplicity that highlights the theme while maintaining the painting’s overall depth. The choice of simple lines accentuates the painting’s conciseness.” Artist C3 noted, “The extensive use of whitespace and the minimalist background design not only enhance the visual effect of the sound waves but also add a sense of spirituality. This characteristic of spaciousness purifies the painting, with a focus on its subject.”

Thus, this Zen painting creates a tranquil and spiritual visual space, guiding the viewers into a spiritual world beyond daily commotion. The whitespace and minimalist lines not only highlight the theme’s purity and depth but also provide the viewers with vast imaginative space, allowing them to feel a sense of peace and harmony within. This work is not just a visual interpretation of sound and silence but also an artistic expression of a deep understanding and reflection on life, nature, and the universe, leading the viewers towards a deeper and more peaceful spiritual realm.

#### 4.8. Blue on Orange

Experts evaluated the Zen painting “Blue on Orange,” as shown in **Figure 8**. In terms of style, the score for elegance was 6.7, revealing the work’s pursuit of a calm aesthetic in color application, which avoids overly flamboyant expressions. The higher scores for simplicity and spaciousness reflect the artwork’s finesse in composition detail and line treatment, as well as ingenious spatial layout and use of whitespace techniques, revealing a Zen-like detachment from the mundane. In the realm of artistic conception, imagery and tranquility scored 8.4 and 8.0



**Figure 8.** The Zen painting characteristics scoring results for “Blue on Orange”.

respectively, indicating the work's success in conveying profound content and a serene atmosphere, offering the viewers an experience of tranquility and contemplation beyond everyday life. The scores for spirituality and asceticism, 6.9 and 6.6, demonstrate the painting's role in guiding the viewers toward spiritual meditation and inner exploration.

On the spiritual level, transcendence scored 7.6, showing the work's ability to move people away from worldly turmoil towards spiritual freedom. The scores for transcendence and sublimity, 6.4 and 5.8, suggest achievements in expressing themes beyond ordinary experience, yet indicate room for further elevation in depicting a transcendent and sublime ethos.

Interview content includes Scholar A1's comment: "Blue on Orange" in lack of explicit representative imagery is visually striking thanks to its combination of colors and shapes. The painting fully presents the viewer's subjective interpretation, and while its imagery is not clear, it may bring multiple meanings based on different viewers' interpretations." Scholar A3 mentioned: "The painting's simple structure in combination with vivid colors creates a feeling of calmness. Even with the bright colors, its overall simple design offers a tranquil experience to the audience." Zen Master B1 expressed: "The painting's concise design transcends the complexities of daily life, distancing from worldly adornment. Its abstractness and simplicity display a detachment, making one feel its purity and nobility."

Hence, the color application and compositional details of this work not only showcase the artist's unique understanding of aesthetic pursuit but also embody the transcendence and inner exploration found in Zen philosophy through the use of whitespace and refined line treatment.









#### 4.9. Extracting Zen Painting Characteristics

This study ranks the scores of each painting in terms of style, artistic conception, and spirit, thereby revealing the degree of conformity of each painting to different characteristics, as shown in **Table 3**. From the perspective of style, all paintings gain a higher score for elegance. "Long River with Snowy Mountains" is particularly prominent, which suggests that elegance is a widely pursued style in these works. It reflects the artists' pursuit of a delicate, restrained, and unobtrusive aesthetic attitude in their expression. In contrast, the scores for spontaneity are generally low, as in "Nocturne," the lowest at 3.9, implying that these works rarely adopt intense or direct expressions.

In terms of artistic conception, all paintings are highly evaluated for spirituality, with "Six Persimmons" being the highest, 8.9, indicating that spirituality is a particularly emphasized characteristic by artists, possibly related to the painting's theme or expression of Zen. However, asceticism scores lower in "Scenes of Wu Yan" and "The Second Patriarch Harmonizing His Mind," both at 5.8, which may reflect that in some works, artists put a less emphasis on a transcendent sentiment or detachment from worldly life.

In the spiritual aspect, transcendence generally scores high, with the highest

**Table 3.** Results of the ranking of each painting according to the degree of conformity with each characteristic, from high to low.

Aspect	Characteristics									Summation	Sorting
style	elegance	9.1	8.0	8.0	6.8	7.0	8.9	8.3	7.8	63.9	5
	splashing	4.0	4.0	4.0	7.7	5.2	5.1	3.9	4.9	38.8	
	simplicity	6.1	6.0	6.0	7.8	7.6	8.0	8.2	8.9	58.6	
	spaciousness	7.9	6.2	6.2	8.8	8.7	8.2	8.6	8.6	63.2	6
	concentration	8.1	7.4	7.4	6.8	6.6	6.8	6.4	6.9	56.4	
artistic conception	imagery	9.0	8.6	8.6	8.3	7.8	8.4	9.0	6.7	66.4	2
	tranquility	9.2	8.3	8.3	6.8	7.4	8.7	8.8	7.7	65.2	3
	purification	7.3	6.4	6.4	7.8	6.1	8.2	6.9	8.6	57.7	
	spirituality	8.9	8.7	8.7	7.7	8.6	8.8	7.9	8.8	68.1	1
	detachment	8.1	5.8	5.8	6.3	7.4	7.4	7.6	7.6	56	
spirit	serendipity	4.9	3.3	3.3	5.9	6.2	7.1	5.2	6.2	42.1	
	transcendence	8.1	6.9	6.9	8.8	8.8	8.2	8.6	7.9	64.2	4
	enlightenment	7.0	4.9	4.9	6.2	7.4	7.6	7.0	6.7	51.7	
	inspiration	5.9	4.0	4.0	6.3	8.7	8.0	7.7	5.7	50.3	
	surpassing	7.4	4.9	4.9	5.8	6.7	7.6	7.3	7.4	52	
	sublimity	6.2	6.4	6.4	5.9	7.2	7.4	7.4	7.4	54.3	

scores in “Huike Cutting Off His Arm” and “Six Persimmons” at 8.8, indicating these paintings generally express the meaning of transcending the everyday and pursuing spiritual freedom. In contrast, scores for serendipity are generally low, suggesting artists in these works have a lower tendency to explore into themes of fate or chance.

Therefore, these paintings generally pursue elegance and simplicity in style, spirituality, and tranquility in artistic conception, and transcendence and inspiration in spirit. The distribution of high and low scores reveals artists’ varying interpretations and emphasis on Zen painting characteristics, reflecting the richness and depth of cultural value in Zen painting expression.

For extracting characteristics of Zen painting, the results are considered standard if the sum of average scores exceeds 60, resulting in spirituality, imagery, tranquility, transcendence, elegance and spaciousness.

## 5. Discussions

Based on the analysis of interviews concerning the characteristics of Zen and Zen painting, experts believe that Zen painting shall be characterized by simplicity, naturalness, spacious simplicity, spirituality, immediacy, transcendence, and detachment.

This study posits that the characteristic of simplicity in Zen painting is manifested in its ultimate concise expression and profound spirituality, focusing on conveying inner spirit and emotions instead of unnecessary decoration. This delivers an in-depth link with its roots in Zen Buddhist thought, providing an artistic pathway that transcends traditional formal constraints to explore the inner world. The characteristic of naturalness in Zen painting is highlighted through smooth and powerful brushstrokes that directly capture the essence of nature, displaying a profound philosophy of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. This not only reflects the artist's deep insight into nature but also their core artistic expression. The characteristic of spacious simplicity is demonstrated through careful use of blank space, innovative composition, and variation in ink density, presenting a contemplative artistic expression that offers the viewers a space for spiritual dialogue with the work, thereby creating a rich and layered artistic experience both visually and emotionally. The characteristic of spirituality is expressed in the deep exploration into and presentation of the spiritual world, where the artist integrates deep feelings and enlightenment from within into the work through an understanding of Zen thought, creating profound spiritual experiences beyond the visual level. The characteristic of immediacy is shown in its impromptu and authentic brushwork, reflecting the artist's profound experience of the moment and appreciation for the beauty of imperfection, incorporating the direct experience of Zen philosophy and valuing authenticity. The characteristic of transcendence is key to its thought-provoking nature, through concise yet profound brushwork and composition, along with a unique artistic atmosphere, freeing the viewers from concrete reality into a broader, deeper space for thought and introspection. The characteristic of detachment in Zen painting works guides the viewers beyond the material world into a profound spiritual realm and meditation, presenting a detached, indifferent attitude through simple yet powerful painting styles, leading viewers into a contemplative and peaceful space.

Furthermore, the study conducted a comprehensive analysis of the characteristics of Zen painting in order to reveal its unique artistic style and deep philosophical implications. The extracted results show that the characteristics of Zen painting include the style-oriented traits of elegance and spacious simplicity, the ideational traits of spirituality, imagery, and tranquility, and the spiritual traits of detachment.

From the perspective of style, the characteristics of Zen painting include elegance and spacious simplicity, reflecting the unique style of form and expression in Zen painting. Elegance gives highlight to the restraint and purity of color in the artwork (Lomas et al., 2017). However, spacious simplicity further celebrates the spatial layout and emotional depth in the artwork, representing a unique approach to expressing nature and the spirit in Zen painting (Panahi et al., 2018). This study also shows that the elegance of Zen painting is manifested in the simplicity of the lines, where the contrast between black and white conveys a sense of elegance, even when the brushstrokes sometimes appear strong, the overall

color scheme still maintains an elegant atmosphere. Spacious simplicity in the work involves extensive use of blank space and minimalist background design, not only enhancing the visual effect of sound waveforms but also giving rise to a sense of spirituality. This characteristic of spacious simplicity purifies the visual field, emphasizing the subject of the painting.

In terms of artistic conception, the characteristics of Zen painting include spirituality, imagery, and tranquility. These qualities emphasize the painting's ability to convey inner emotions and philosophical thoughts. Imagery reflects the artist's skill in conveying deep meanings through visual language (Li, 2017). Tranquility and spirituality give highlight to the serene and transcendent atmosphere within the artwork (Zhang, 2017). Through interviews, this study has found that imagery in Zen painting creates an artistic conception of Zen and enlightenment, which is vivid and profound, enabling the viewers to further contemplate and associate with Buddhist Zen philosophy. Tranquility is the peace and quietness displayed in the works, as if the viewers were led into a world far from the hustle and bustle, a pure realm. This unique tranquil artistic conception becomes a major feature of the painting, offering a sense of peace to the soul. Spirituality is not just a visual presentation in the painting but also a guide for the soul, encouraging people to deeply explore into and reflect on their inner world so as to seek their true selves.

Finally, from the spiritual perspective, transcendence is a key characteristic of Zen painting. This trait not only embodies the profound philosophical roots of Zen painting but also reflects the artist's deep understanding of and exploration into life and the truths of the universe. Transcendence enables Zen painting to be more than a display of visual art; it represents a profound expression of spirit and thought (Ke, 2015; Cai, 2021). This study also shows that transcendence in Zen painting fully exhibits a mood detached from the mundane by forming a sharp contrast with the trivialities of daily life and completely breaking free from this world so as to inspire a desire to seek inner peace and transcendence. In summary, this study reveals the common characteristics of Zen painting, which not only enrich our understanding of Zen painting but also provide new perspectives and inspiration for future art research and practice.

## 6. Conclusion

This study has systematically explored the characteristics of Zen painting by engaging with a diverse group of experts through in-depth interviews. As a unique form of art, Zen painting offers a rich presentation of deep philosophical meanings in addition to giving a display of remarkable visual characteristics. This study's comprehensive analysis of Zen painting has extracted characteristics such as elegance, simplicity and openness, spirituality, imagery, tranquility, and transcendence. These traits highlight the uniqueness of Zen painting in terms of form and its effective ability to convey inner emotions and profound philosophical thoughts. By extracting the characteristics of Zen painting, we can not only gain



a deeper understanding of the aesthetic qualities of this art category, but also provide rich inspiration and new perspectives for future art research and practice.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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