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## Spiritual Rituals of Chinese Ink Painting: The Suggestions of Shitao

Eva Kit Wah Man

### Abstract

Ritual has an essential connection with art. This article suggests that the study on Shitao has significance in proposing a ritual theory of art for two reasons. First, textual analysis on his treatise on ink painting, *Hua-pu*, demonstrates that an artist is/should be involved in the interconnectedness of what he or she depicts. This involvement requires penetration into the primordial intuition towards what he or she perceives and has an ethical imperative to use the artist's talent conferred by heaven. Second, Shitao's artistic practice is interpreted as a form of rites that are a reaction to the sociopolitical changes during the Ming-Qing dynastic transition. The elaboration on Shitao's identity and *Hua-pu's* relevance to Daoism will further support the argument. And it is in this sense that Shitao's case reveals the claim that "art is ritual," which is metaphorical as it appeals to an ideal form of art.

### Key Words

brush ink painting; Daois; *Hua-pu*; one-stroke theory; performance theory; practice theory; ritual; Shitao

### 1. Ritual and rituals in art

*Ritual*, directly from Latin *ritualis*, originally had the meaning of "relating to (religious) rites." The word can also be derived from *ritus*, meaning "religious observance or ceremony, custom, usage."<sup>[1]</sup> It seems that religion, at least etymologically, plays a significant role in defining what is ritual. This hypothesis can be partly proven when we trace back the history of theories on ritual and religion, of which Catherine Bell provides a fairly

comprehensive depiction in her practical introduction to ritual practice and its study, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*. According to Bell, both the historical origins and the ahistorical or eternal essence of religion are the major concerns of ritual scholars.[2] Questions such as whether religion and culture are originally rooted in ritual do not only give rise to a prolonged and productive debate on the origins of religion but also brings about some influential approaches, in a roughly chronological ordering—evolutionary, sociological, and psychological—from which the first generation of scholarship on ritual study emerged. Then came the functional-structuralist approach. Instead of emphasizing the individualism, mysticism, or emotionalism of ritual action, this generation of theoretical studies of ritual combined the interests in the mechanism for maintaining social equilibrium with the structural perspective on the organization of symbols to explore how ritual affects the organization and workings of the social group. In other words, the functional-structuralist approach focused on what ritual accomplishes as a social phenomenon and, specifically, how it facilitates social life.[3]

However, new concerns about how ritual and social structures changed over time or under duress, in addition to interest in how symbolic and linguistic systems work, have urged theorists to go beyond the framework of functional structuralism. As a result, the emergence of the concept of ritual as “a form of cultural communication that transmits the cognitive categories and dispositions that provide people with important aspects of their sense of reality” appears to be the synthesis of the successive layering of scholarly predecessors, which can be categorized as the so-called culturalist perspective on ritual.[4] Notably, within this perspective theories of ritual performance and the proposal of defining ritual as a form of cultural practice are most influential. The 1970s saw both the emergence of a performance approach to the study of ritual and formulations of human action as praxis/practice in anthropology and then in conjunction with the greater attention given to the lingering effects of colonialism. The practice theory of ritual began to gain currency, regarding ritual as “a cultural and historical construction that has been heavily used to differentiate various styles and degrees of religiosity, rationality, and cultural determinism.”[5]

Can artistic practice be treated as a form of performance or a cultural and historical construction? Or, how can we argue for a theory of art as ritual? To answer such questions, perhaps we shall step back and start from the religious ritual. When Cynthia Freeland tries to assess the validity of a theory of art as ritual, religious ritual comes first in her mind. In her short but popular introduction to art theory, *But Is It Art?: An Introduction to Art*

*Theory*, Freeland's understanding on ritual is quite the same as ritual's etymological meaning, in that she emphasizes that ritual reinforces the participants' proper relation to God or nature through gestures that everyone in the community clearly understands and frankly agrees with.[6] By pointing out that art, like ritual, with its rich colors, design, and spectacle, always involves producing symbolic value by the use of ceremonies, gestures, and artifacts, Freeland proposes a viable theory of art as ritual that "ordinary objects or acts acquire symbolic significance through incorporation into a shared belief system." [7] However, after an assessment of ritualized or ritual-like contemporary art, especially feminist art and performance art, their seeming irrelevance to religion raises Freeland's doubts on the ritual theory of art:

The theory of art as communal ritual fails to account for the value and effects of much contemporary art. The experience of walking into a spacious, well-lit, and air-conditioned gallery or a modern concert hall may have its own ritualistic aspects, but ones completely unlike those achieved by the sober participants with shared transcendent values ... such as a Mayan or Australian Aboriginal tribal gathering. It seems unlikely we are seeking to contact the gods and higher reality, or appease spirits of our ancestors.[8]

There is no doubt that ritual has an essential connection with art, as Freeland admits art can have its own ritualistic aspects, although she takes the ancient religious rituals as a given. As we have seen and will see in what goes on in the history of theories about ritual, ritual-like activities are not unique to religious institutions or traditions and there are many ways for people to act ritually. Tom Leddy, in an earlier draft of his response to Freeland's account, notices that something valuable in ritual draws Freeland's attention to think of the nature of art, but points out that there is no need to hastily deny the claim of a ritual theory of art by the assumption that ritual simply *identifies* art, where art and ritual are both in their narrow sense, that is, art referring to some contemporary art and/or ritual going back to tribal ritual.[9]

There is no doubt that the explication of artworks and the interpretation of ritual are changing and evolving over time in the history of both studies. While this article regrettably is not able to provide a picture of the evolution of the understanding of artworks and only focuses on that of ritual research because of space limits, it is interesting to see how scholars have noticed

a considerable overlap between the concerns of philosophers of art and those engaged in ritual studies. Examples are artworks presenting themselves as instruments of knowledge, as representative, expressive, or purely formal objects; scholars in ritual studies proposed the corresponding definitions of ritual to the classical theories of art.[10] For example, expressionism claims that it is the essence of art that artworks communicate feelings and mirror human being's emotional life; likewise, Bruce Kapferer regards the organization of dance gestures by a Sri Lanka exorcist as "a culturally recognizable modeling of emotion or feeling," and the form of feeling is "a model for the reality of experience." [11] In this sense, not only the artist inspired by ritual seeks to get into a deeper form of art that probably addresses similar human needs as addressed by ritual, but a philosophical theorization of the nature of art is also able to apply itself to the questions raised by ritual studies. It is this intimacy between art and ritual and their studies that draw me to the performance and practice approaches to ritual that I believe can provide a paradigm to analyze rituals' role in artistic practice and artworks.

## 2. Performance and practice approaches

Historically speaking, a number of ideas came together to yield the models of seeing ritual as a performative medium, including Victor Turner's notion of social dramas and Erving Goffman's work on the ritual units that structure the performances of social interaction.[12] In general, most performance theories have their three major central principles. First, they appeal to the physical and sensual aspects of ritual as an event in which ritual participants are regarded as active subjects who actually effect changes in their perceptions and interpretations by their creativity, physicality and reflexivity. Second, the concept of "framing" is featured to distinguish ritual as such that gives the acts a privileged status that communicates the message "this has extra significance" and creates a sense of condensed totality of the macrocosm. Third, performance theorists are very concerned with peculiar efficacy of ritual activities, implying that an effective ritual performance would be one in which a type of transformation or situation is achieved.[13] As summarized by Bell, "performance theory has proven useful in its stress on the dramatic process, the significance of the physical and bodily expressiveness found in ritual, and its evocative attention to secular and new forms of ritual or ritual-like activity." [14]

Sharing a number of concerns with performance theory, particularly its emphasis on historical change and acting individuals as bodies, practice theory also sees human activities as formal as religious rituals or as casual as leisure activities. It is said that human beings continually reproduce and reshape their

social and cultural environments, and these are now re-attended in their relationships to the political and social dimensions.[15] Scholars in anthropology, sociology, and history have developed a number of highly theoretical models for the cultural practices involved in ritual activity. In her earlier discourse on ritual, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, Bell addresses her methodology of a practice approach to ritual, which can be summarized into three major points. First, the approach addresses the real context of ritual actions, which means the full spectrum of ways of acting within any given culture, and when and why such ritualization is deemed to be effective. Second, it explores how the body movements of ritually knowledgeable agents hold the primacy in terms of the central quality of ritual actions, as their physical actions actually simultaneously define, experience, and reproduce the cultural values ordering the environment. Third, practice theorists are more concerned with how ritual works as a vehicle for the construction and inscription of power relationships, and, as a result, ritualization is more likely to posit the existence of a type of authoritative reality that is deemed to derive from beyond the immediate situation according to the values that differentiate the sacred as transcendent.[16]

It is these features of ritual and ritual-like activity, with their useful concepts and tools for analysis and reflection suggested by the performance and practice approaches, that make me think of Shitao (石濤) (1642-1707), the influential painter in the late *Ming* and early *Qing* period in China, whose theories and practice demonstrate ritualistic approach to art, for at least two reasons. First, Shitao's key theory of one-stroke (*yi-hua* 一畫) in his surviving notes on ink painting, *Hua-pu* (《畫譜》, *Treatise on the Philosophy of Painting*) provides a systematic discourse on rituals in artistic practice. The one-stroke in ink painting is argued as both a visible event and a metaphysical concept that includes primordial intuition, spiritual transformation, and ways to achieve the proper forms of living. The methodology to demonstrate Shitao's ritualistic components is to investigate the key concepts in *Hua-pu* with reference to the arguments in the performance and practice approaches to ritual. Second, Shitao's personal experience provides crucial references to the understanding of his painting as a sort of ritual in which his theoretical inscriptions are carried out in praxis. Here, his artistic practice as ritual can be interpreted as an individual form of rites, reacting to the social and political changes during the *Ming-Qing* dynastic transition when Manchu, as foreign rulers, took over the Han China. The textual analysis that follows reveals much to the related complex.

### 3. Rituals in Shitao's artistic practice

Shitao is not only well known as an ink artist but also as a prominent art theorist who suggests art as metaphysics. To discuss ritual's role in artistic practice in Shitao's philosophical reflections on the art form, *Hua-pu*, [17] the following textual analysis first begins with the discussion of the artist, focuses on the concept of *yin-yün* (氤氳), and turns to the nature of the world, summarizing Shitao's idea of painting as representation. It finally addresses to the relationship between artist and the world, mainly elaborating the concepts of *zun-shou* (尊受) and *zi-ren* (資任), which are some of the key notions in Shitao's theory of art.

For Shitao, the definition of *yin-yün*, in terms of painting theory, is a fusion of brush strokes and ink wash: "When the brush strokes and ink wash are unified, this is called *yinyün* [*yin-yün*], that is, harmonious atmosphere. Yin and yün are not divided; they are harmonized (nondifferentiated)."[18] This unity, argued by Jonathan S. Hay, one of the authoritative scholars in the study of Shitao, is a dialectic one, where brush and ink are placed on equal footing, and are respectively emblematic in Shitao's writing of "the controlled, directed act and the material reaction with its margin of autonomy." [19] But the interaction between brush and ink is, after all, realized by the practice of the artist, and therefore places great demands on the artist's wrist, of which Shitao lists some characteristics. For example, a revolving wrist should be flexible and alert (*xu-ling* 虛靈), be gifted in substantiality (*shou-shi* 受實) and flexibility (*shou-xu* 受虛). With such qualities, the artist "moves the brush with a revolving movement," "enriches the strokes by rolling the brush hairs," and "leaves them unbounded by any limitations." [20] What *yin-yün* does is exactly the physical aspects of artmaking, which can be treated as a performative medium for the artist's deployment and embodiment of his or her schemes of physical action. Shitao concludes this unity of brush strokes and ink wash visualized by the master of wrist, as follows:

... on a one foot long scroll through painting,  
 the appearance and structure of things are completely  
 transformed. In  
 harmonious atmosphere, illumination issues forth. Even if the  
 brush stroke is not  
 a brush stroke (does not appear particularly desirable), ink is not  
 ink (fails  
 to impress), and the painting is not painting (does not qualify as  
 exemplary),  
 my own reality is in the painting, for one moves the ink, the ink  
 does not move  
 him. He holds the brush, the brush does not hold him; he is free  
 from early  
 form or style and does not wait for early style to free him. [21]

With the ongoing fusion of brush strokes and ink wash, “this unified, individualized whole [*yin-yün*] confronts the viewer as the displacement of the painter’s self: a self-presentation with the authority of the body’s investment.”[22] The artistic practice is now a scheme generated and mobilized by the body’s movement, ritually. Thus, the goal of artmaking, as such, is completely circular: the creation of an art-making agent, a performing or practicing actor with a form of art-making mastery, who embodies flexible sets of schemes and can deploy them effectively in multiple situations so that he or she can reconstruct those situations in practical ways.

The issue of painting as representation comes up. When Shitao talks about the skills to paint peaks, he lists sixteen different types of peaks, and argues that:

An artist must follow the different forms of peaks to reproduce the various aspects of peaks. Peaks and wrinkles are one (there must be an agreement or conformity between them). Wrinkles are produced from peaks, but the peaks cannot transform the substance and function of wrinkles. On the other hand, the wrinkles are able to supply the conditions (potentiality) of peaks.[23]

It is because of the various forms of peaks that corresponding wrinkles are required to represent them. In addition, things are not only diverse in quantity but also in mobility, and are organic in their quality:

To paint the reality of mountains, streams and the manifold things, depict the back and the front, the different aspects (vertical and horizontal), that which is clustered or scattered, near or distant, inside or outside, vacant or solid, broken or connected, gradations and roughness, richness and elegance, and misty vagueness. These are the essential elements of lively potentiality.[24]

This lively potentiality stays in every object, and the portrait of the object is also affected by the change of time: “Whenever one paints the scenery of the four seasons, the style and flavor vary accordingly. Cloudy weather and clear weather differ from each other. Observe the seasons and determine the weather in order to express them.”[25] However, Shitao’s understanding does not stop at suggesting the mobility within the individual object through time. For him, all things in the world are somehow associated with each other. As a result, the whole artistic

practice unfolds itself as an event and contains all its expressions in the inseparable and overall organic relationship between a human and the world or environment. Here, the performance theory of ritual also provides insights on such practice and the strategy of artistic involvement. Bell suggests that ritual participants tend to see themselves as responding or transmitting, and their highly orchestrated activities of ritualization appear to be the appropriate thing to do, if not the easiest.[26] In other words, ritualization is a way of engaging the wide consensus that actions are doing so as a type of natural response to a world conceived and interpreted. It is in this sense that artmaking can be compared to ritual, especially the genre of rites of exchange and communion that tends to help articulate complex systems of relationships among human beings, the world, and so on. Artists are thus not constructing but responding to circumstances and participating in the creation of a profound sense of cosmos interrelatedness. This echoes very closely to Shitao's theory of painting and its practices.

Now it is natural and logical to turn to the concepts of *zun-shou* (尊受) and *zi-ren* (資任) to more fully understand the relationship between the artist and the world. According to Liangzhi Zhu (朱良志), an academic authority in Shitao's study, the concept of *zun-shou* contains two meanings, first, referring to direct feelings when an artist perceives the world, and second, signifying primordial intuition which is the artist's intuitive insights on the world.[27] The former is the basis for when the artist penetrates into the reality of the landscape; the latter is the transformation that happens when the landscape is manifested by the artist's creativity.[28] So the concept of *zun-shou* is much about the efficacy of artmaking, and this is where we can again refer to the principle of ritual as performance. Also emphasizing the peculiar efficacy, performance theorists distinguish ritual activities from literal communication and pure entertainment by suggesting that what emerges from ritual is not only the event of the performance itself but also the shifts and changes brought about by this event that construct a new situation and a new reality.[29] In this sense, to achieve a type of transformation by virtue of the dynamic and diachronic characteristics is the common goal for a ritual performance and a Shitao's painting. The verb *shou* (受) acts as this two-folded conceptual role to connect artist with the world: "Painting is transmitted by the ink, ink is transmitted by the brush, brush is transmitted by the wrist, and the wrist is transmitted by the mind, just as heaven creates life and earth completes it. This is creative intuition." [30] It should be pointed out that *shou* has the same pronunciation of the other verb *shou* (授) but with a different meaning: the first *shou* (受) refers to intuition, the

second *shou* (授) means givenness, and they are interchangeable. When talking about primordial intuition, one cannot assume that everybody has equal inborn qualities and is able to acquire the given talents or potentiality to be the best, as “this is what heaven gives to man.”[31] But there is no need to complain about the gift given by heaven. Instead, one should *zun* (尊), which Shitao elaborates further, “it requires that people consider valuable the obtaining of this primordial intuition and do not underestimate or deprecate themselves.”[32]

This attitude is further justified when Shitao, in the final chapter of his treatise, proposes the concept of *zi-ren* to address the ethical value of painting. After stating the qualities that heaven or *Dao* assigns to the landscape and how landscape manifests its nature, he deduces the argument to human being:

Man receives his qualities from heaven and fulfills them. It is not for the mountain to interfere with man. From this point of view, we see that the mountain spontaneously fulfills its qualities as they should be fulfilled. We cannot change the qualities of the mountain and fulfill them. Therefore the integrated man cannot change the real qualities of the mountain and enjoy the mountain.[33]

Endowed by heaven, both the artist and the landscape possess their own qualities that they have their respective responsibilities to fulfill. This is quite similar to the mechanism of ritual argued by the functionalist approach to ritual:

For social functionalists, ritual is a means to regulate and stabilize the life of this system, adjust its internal interactions, maintain its group ethos, and restore a state of harmony after any disturbance. As such, religion and ritual are social mechanisms with a particularly vital role to play in maintaining the system.[34]

On one hand, artmaking as ritual is thus given a sense of human responsibility for more than his or her own immediate needs, as the artist sees activities as simply the appropriate correspondence to Heaven. On the other hand, artistic practice as ritual-like activities actually reveal the fundamental dimension of ritualization as depicted by Bell, “the simple imperative to do something in such a way that the doing itself gives the acts a special or privileged status.”[35] In this sense, the style of painting creates a type of framework around the artistic practice that, in a way, communicates a specific microcosmic portrayal of the macrocosm.

Starting from the artist's authority on brush and ink, to the mobility and connectedness of the landscape, and finally to the concepts of *zun-shou* and *zi-ren*, what has been demonstrated is ritual's role in artistic practice, namely, that the visualization of the fusion of brush and ink in the painting surface is prepared by the artist's involvement in the interconnectedness of the landscape he or she encounters. This involvement requires the penetration into the realm of the natural world and the primordial intuition towards what he or she perceives and has an ethical imperative to use the talent that heaven assigns to him or her. Therefore, Shitao's declaration that "Mountains, rivers and I meet on a spiritual level and mingle together without trace" becomes intelligible.[36] In addition, the tools of the performance and practice approaches to ritual undoubtedly help to formulate a way of looking at artistic practice in the form of a ritual-like activity, which is to appreciate the physical and bodily expressiveness found in artmaking and its deliberate types of demonstration that tend to invoke both the larger cosmic order and the specific immediate situation.

#### 4. Contexts: Shitao's identity and Daoism's relevance

However, if we examine Shitao's identity and his painting career contextually, it is interesting to draw attention to the role of ritual in his artistic practice from a different perspective. Shitao was descended from a *Ming* princely lineage. The little imperial family member was brought to a temple in the city of Wuchang (武昌) in Hubei (湖北) at an early age and started learning to read and paint as a Buddhist monk till his youth. Simply taking into account the birth and education, one can easily tell that Shitao, as a Chinese literatus/*shi* (士) who also owns an imperial background, is not only "a remnant subject (*yimin*) of the *Ming*," but also a "*yimin*, literally 'a subject who has fled,' or more simply a hermit." [37] Shitao's life stories mostly happened in the South of China. Before his high-yield period (from around 1697 to 1707) in Yangzhou (揚州), Shitao left the Southern temples and traveled to the North, pursuing a career within the Buddhist hierarchy and acting as a professional artist in and around Beijing, the capital of *Qing* Dynasty. But the hope for imperial patronage by Emperor Kangxi (康熙) was defeated. After the four years of unsuccessful experiences, he determined to go back to Yangzhou, in which there was a historical sympathy towards *yi-min* and a vast painting market.[38]

Around 1697, three to four years after his return to the South, Daoist fervors in a visible central place in Shitao's public identity is witnessed. Hay treats Shitao's conversion as the subordination of the Buddhist character of his past to his Daoist sympathies.[39] It is noted that Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism have joint and mixed influences since the Tang

dynasty on Chinese literati and even in the community lives. Shitao's attraction to the three traditions is notable. His earlier life spent on climbing Confucian official stairs, then Buddhist influences on his life style since his youth, and Daoist influences had been regularly demonstrated in more or less pure form in his former thirty-year painting career.[40] His failure in getting a position in Beijing but then gaining popularity in the Yangzhou community helps one's understanding of the depiction of leisure in Shitao's landscape, which signifies political withdrawal. In terms of the aesthetics and visuality in painting, this shift could be reflected on Shitao's increased use of brilliant or raw colors, subjects of leisurely living and outings, or the extraordinary, such as Yellow Mountain and new engagement with visions, and the like. Trails of this particular identity can also be detected from the contents in his paintings. In Hay's analysis on the inhabitants and social geography of Shitao's landscapes, it was found that "the *shi* in literati and gentry guise" provides the main figures created by Shitao, and the four zones in his paintings described by Hay, "the leisure zone, the far-flung realm of the strange, the no-man's-land of interurban travel, and the dreamlike city, appear to escape, or, we might better say, deny – both the law of the market and the law of the state" configure the dominant social geography of his paintings.[41] Hay, based on these striking patterns, points out "the central importance of leisure as a marker of class identity in Shitao's landscape world." [42]

Such understanding could be further explored if we interpret Shitao's artistic practice and artworks as a form of rites. In traditional Chinese society, the literati responses to the decay and rise of dynasties are full of rituality. How would a *Ming* remnant react to the fall of the dynasty, reconcile with his identity, and survive in a regime ruled by a non-*Han* emperor? One of the sound theoretical explanations suggests that the two poles regarding the literati responses to the fall of their dynasty are loyalism and collaboration, which can both be understood in terms of the paradigms furnished by death ritual. Loyalists refuse to pursue politics, feign madness, or even suicide; these are interpreted as a symbolic accompanying-in-death or mourning for their parent country. Collaborators join the new government, and their acts are justified as another form of symbolic self-sacrifice or the so-called "voluntary servitude." [43] From the sociopolitical perspective, these two alternative political options are both necessary for maintaining the social equilibrium during the transition of the two dynasties, and they imply an underlying social mechanism of ritual, as read by Hay in the following:

In one case operating a continuity of dynastic time, in the other its suspension, the two mechanisms in effect

jointly contributed to the naturalization of the dynastic changeover, operating as one of the multiple means of reproduction of the dynastic system. Through the play of temporalities associated with different ritualized political options, the dynastic transition was structured as a ritual narrative, in which both loyalists and collaborators were necessary, and in which the plot, like that of a Chinese play, had the seeming inexorability of destiny.[44]

If put into one of the basic genres of ritual action, this form of symbolic human sacrifice, which can also be seen as a simple extension of the logic underlying other forms of offering, falls into the rites of exchange and communion. This implies that many of Shitao's landscape paintings, with their central importance of leisure, can be read as the ritual practice of political mourning, in the form of his restless creation of different spaces of interior exile. *Qingxiang Dadizi's Reminiscence of the Thirty-six Peaks* (《清湘大滌子三十六峰意》) and *Repotting Chrysanthemum* (《對菊圖》) are such two typical artworks to understand the political inflection in Shitao's landscape space, where Shitao locates the two-folded *yi-min* status within the metaphorical environment of the wilderness/madness (野), "a space of displacement, where the displacement referred to the particular subjecthood of exile or withdrawal." [45]

Therefore, the context of Shitao's identity and personal experience are inseparable from Shitao's artistic practice. Painting is a way that Shitao acts in his world, and all those ways that he acts will influence the practice and understanding of his painting, and also his theoretical completion of one-stroke theory. In *Hua-pu*, all of the concepts demonstrated above find their close connection to the concept of one-stroke, and one-stroke is actually the only single absolute unifying principle underlying the practice of painting. When one-stroke is argued in the inseparable and overall relationship between humans and the world, in terms of its state and propagation, two other metaphysical concepts of *meng-yang* (蒙養) and *sheng-huo* (生活) appear as companions:

The splashing of the ink onto the brush is to be done with spirit. Ink wash cannot be spiritual unless one has achieved the state of concealment in nondifferentiation. If the brush stroke is not endowed with vitality, then the brush is without spirit. If the brush contains the spirit of concealment in nondifferentiation yet cannot release the

spirit of life, then this is ink wash without brush strokes. If one's brush can contain the spirit of life, but cannot transform this into concealment in nondifferentiation, then this is having brush strokes without ink wash.[46]

Here, Zhu's explanation has its significance in understanding these two concepts. According to Zhu, *meng-yang* comes from *Ching* (《易經》) and has three implications in the context of *Hua-pu*: (1) the instinctive *Dao* (道) of the landscape, (2) the primordial state of simple and unadorned, in terms of cosmogenesis, and (3) the real origin and potentiality, somehow the same as Laozi's metaphor of the infant.[47] And *sheng-huo* (生活), like a painting terminology, has at least three meanings according to Shitao: (1) the living state of all things on earth; (2) the vigorous interaction among them; and (3) the omnipresent creativity that is the innermost power of life.[48] The intimacy between Shitao's metaphysical ideas and Daoism is no doubt in the light of these two concepts.[49]

The Daoists believe that the metaphysical realm of the *Dao* is the origin of truth, beauty, and goodness. In this transcendental realm of the *Dao*, a thing is not an object but an "ideal state," a form in itself, appreciation of which is capable only with Daoist wisdom and practice, in which the sense of beauty and aesthetic pleasure, the real form of freedom, spring up in tranquility. Achievement of this state requires an effort of transcendence of all human epistemological constraints or judgments, as Kant's aesthetics prescribes, and engagement in the metaphysical realm of the *Dao*. According to Mou Zongsan, in the realm of the *Dao*, when the human mind has stopped "knowing" and travels with the basic universal element *qi* (氣), it is able to perceive things in their original nature. "Not knowing" is a state of "intellectual intuition" of the mind, in the Daoist sense, as this results in no differentiation of mind and body, form and matter, or subject and object but the emergence of all things, including the minds, in themselves. They are juxtaposed with each other without being known. It is thus a disinterested, non-intentional and non-regulative state and is therefore, aesthetic in nature. [50] Mou's elaboration of the state is as follows:

The state of mind of *xin-zhai* is the termination, tranquility, emptiness, and nothingness that follow the abolition of the quest and dependency on learning and knowing. The *wu-wei* of the above necessarily implies a certain kind of creativity, whose form is so special that it can be named as negative creativity ... that in the light of the tranquil state... things present themselves in the way that they are ... not as an object, but as an

ideal state  
... and this is the static “intellectual intuition.”[51]

The relevance to Daoism can also be easily detected even at the very beginning of Shitao's *Hua-pu*, which is an initial statement of cosmogenesis. It echoes *Daodejing* (《道德經》), setting the stage for the one-stroke as the continuity of being that unites the self and the world:

In remote, ancient days there were no principles. The primordial p'o (or state of uncarved block) had not been dispersed. As soon as the primordial p'o was dispersed, principles emerged. How did these principles emerge? They were founded upon the oneness of strokes. This oneness of strokes is the origin of all beings, the root of myriad forms. It is revealed through spiritual reality, and is innate in man. However, man in the world does not realize this. I was the first to discover the principle of oneness of strokes.[52]

The Oneness obviously refers to the Daoist metaphysics. In addition, in this self-regulating practice, artists have their own ethical imperatives to fulfill and they function as being receptive to heaven's endowment. As a result, the artistic practice can be argued again as a performative medium, like ritual, which can be characterized as “cosmological ordering,” since it focuses on the ritual re-creation of perfect harmony between the human and the divine realms, complying with the Daoist wisdom that “if everyone kept to their place, there would be harmony and well-being.”[53] In addition, with the introduction of the word *fa* (法) or method, one-stroke affirms its unique transcendental position that encompasses and unites all things in the world. And the nature of the one-stroke becomes more expressive when Shitao explains *fa* in detail:

If the oneness of brush strokes is understood, then there is no veil before one's eyes and painting can flow freely from his mind. When painting issues directly from the mind, obstructions naturally recede. To have the true method is to be free from obstructions; to have obstructions is to lack the genuine method. The method is produced in the act of painting and obstructions diminish. When method and obstruction do not mix, the meaning of the action is obtained, the Tao of painting is clear, and the one-stroke is thoroughly understood.[54]

The painter said most artists are enslaved and obstructed by those so-called methods but they haven't grasped the true meaning of method. So what is the true method according to Shitao? "The principle of oneness of strokes is such that from no-method method originates; from one method, all methods harmonize." [55] "Thus the perfect man has no method. No-method is the method which is the perfect method. Therefore, to have method, one must have transformations.

Transformations, then, yield the method of no-method." [56] So, due to the mobility and interconnectedness of the landscape, the perfect method, with the involvement of artists whose inborn creativity is naturally determined, is no-method method.

Hay provides his understanding on the underlying logic in Shitao's argument that "[t]o align himself with that *fa* was to occupy a utopian, free-wandering point that transcended ancients, moderns, and the individual self, though he was necessarily forced into calling it 'my own *fa*.'" [57] However, if we recall the features of performance and practice theories, that is, the dynamic of framing and the tendency to promote authority, they can also throw light on the understanding of *fa*. By virtue of the dynamics of framing, ritual as performance is understood to be something other than routine reality but the potential to signify or denote larger truths and create a complete and condensed artificial world. [58] This artificial world is realized by ritualization as a way of acting in which the participant may embody and deploy various schemes for molding the immediate environment and experiences within it, and differentiates the sacred as transcendent. As a result, as Bell depicts, the participant/artist acquires "an instinctive knowledge of schemes that can be used to order his or her experience so as to render it more or less coherent with these ritual values concerning the sacred." [59]

## 5. Conclusion

In Leddy's conclusion of his earlier draft to respond to Freeland's account on the theory of art as ritual, a citation from John Dewey's *Art as Experience* is made to support his argument, that the definition of "art is ritual" is/should be honorific and metaphorical with the function of its appealing to "an ideal form of art, something that we could attempt to achieve again in some way." [60] In the end, he puts his claim into a simple sentence: "art is ritual' is (or was) a call to change society by way of changing our relation to art." [61]

It is not easy to argue that Shitao had any blatant ambition to change the mind of the authority or the aesthetic taste of the painting market. However, it can be at least said that Shitao's artistic practice was a survivor's continual response to his life situations, reconciliation with his complex identities, cognition of

his assumed destiny, and a sacred realm to be with the metaphysical Dao. It is in this sense that Shitao's case is revealing to the ritual theory of art.

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## Endnotes

[1] The etymological investigation of the word was primarily conducted by searching through the Online Etymology Dictionary. See "Ritual," Online Etymology Dictionary. Accessed Aug 5, 2017, [http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed\\_in\\_frame=0&search=ritual](http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=ritual).

[2] Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 20.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 23-60.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 2.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. ix.

[6] Cynthia Freeland, *But Is It Art?: An Introduction to Art Theory* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 4.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 2.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 8.

[9] Tom Leddy, "Is There A Ritual Theory of Art?" (draft of paper to be presented), p. 7.

[10] With regard to more examples of the overlap between the concerns of philosophers of art and those engaged in ritual studies, see Ron G. Williams and James W. Boyd, *Ritual Art and*

*Knowledge: Aesthetic Theory and Zoroastrian Ritual* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), pp. 5-11.

[11] Bruce Kapferer, *A Celebration of Demons: Exorcism and the Aesthetics of Healing in Sri Lanka* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), p. 195.

[12] Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1974); Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, No.Y.: Doubleday, 1959) and *Interaction Ritual* (Chicago: Aldine, 1967). Relying on Bell, p. 73.

[13] *Ibid.*, pp. 72-76, 159-164.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 76.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 76.

[16] *Ibid.*, pp. 81-83.

[17] On the authenticity of *Hua-pu* and the question of the treatise's various recensions and titles, Jonathan S. Hay (2001, 208-209, 364) has provided an overview and list of bibliography. See Jonathan S. Hay, *Shitao: Painting and Modernity in early Qing China*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 208-209, 364. The English translations cited in this paper come from Earle Jerome Coleman's English translation. See Earle Jerome Coleman (1971), "Philosophy of Painting by Shih-t'ao: A Translation and Exposition of his Hua- p'u (*Treatise on the Philosophy of Painting*)" (Ph.D Dissertation, The University of Hawaii, 1971), pp. 141-180.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 154.

[19] Hay, p. 271.

[20] Coleman, pp. 152-153.

[21] *Ibid.*, pp. 154-155.

[22] Hay, pp. 275-276.

[23] Coleman, pp. 159-160.

[24] *Ibid.*, pp. 149-150.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 170.

[26] Bell, pp. 167-168

[27] Liangzhi Zhu, *ShitaoYanjiu* (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2005), pp. 46-50. With regard to the influence of Zen Buddhism on the meaning of primordial intuition, see Zhu's another article, "New Interpretation of 'Yi Hua'", *Journal of Peking University (Humanities and Social Sciences)*, Issue 6, (2002), 46-55.

[28] Zhu, p. 56.

[29] Bell, pp. 74-75.

[30] Coleman, p. 147.

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 175.

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 147.

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 178.

[34] Bell, p. 29.

[35] Bell, p. 161.

[36] Coleman, p. 158.

[37] Hay, pp. 31, 41.

[38] Yangzhou remained under the control of the short-lived Southern *Ming* based in Nanjing, and fell in 1645, followed by a massacre. However, the city recovered fast and earned its great prosperity for its administrative, economic, and cultural role to the dynasty. It was also the essential stop for *Qing* emperors during their Southern Tours. Regarding to Shitao's experience in the North, Hay has a detailed description. See *Ibid.*, pp. 97-109.

[39] *Ibid.*, pp. 257, 276. With regard to Shitao's conversion, Zhu holds the opinion that the character of Zen Buddhism has a more fundamental influence on Shitao. See Liangzhi Zhu, "New Interpretation of 'Yi Hua'", *Journal of Peking University (Humanities and Social Sciences)*, Issue 6, (2002), 46-55.

[40] Hay, pp. 242, 258-259.

[41] *Ibid.*, pp. 30-35.

[42] *Ibid.*, p. 26.

[43] *Ibid.*, pp. 38-40.

[44] *Ibid.*, p. 40.

[45] *Ibid.*, pp. 37-42.

[46] Coleman, p. 149.

[47] Zhu, pp. 57-74.

[48] *Ibid.*, pp. 64-69.

[49] Although the intimacy with Daoism is emphasized in this paper, it is important to point out that since the Han Dynasty, various streams of the pre-Qin schools of the thought often played a joint part in the thinking of Chinese literati. For example, *Huainanzi* (淮南子), which is usually classified as Daoist, attempts on a grand scale to synthesize the best ideas from opposing systems of philosophy. It is therefore very hard to classify Shitao's thought into one school, as the adoption and

fusion of classical schools of thought are common and seen as positive in his era.

[50] Mou Zongsan, *Intellectual Intuition and Chinese Philosophy* (Taiwan: Commercial Press, 1974), pp. 208-211.

[51] *Ibid.*

[52] Coleman, p. 142.

[53] Bell, p. 187,

[54] Coleman, p. 144.

[55] *Ibid.*, p. 142.

[56] *Ibid.*, p. 145.

[57] Hay, pp. 256.

[58] Bell, pp. 160.

[59] *Ibid.*, pp. 82.

[60] Leddy, pp. 9.

[61] *Ibid.*, pp. 10.

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