

# The Concept of Nothingness in Dao's Wisdom and Its Manifestation in Chinese Landscape Painting and the Study of Mayoan's Artworks

## Abstract

If the word "contemplation" was studied in its full sense, that is, thoughtfulness with fear and trepidation, no notion such as nothingness and non-existence would have trembled the human soul. It is less a cultural and epistemological system that, in the foundation of its semantic structure, does not seek an answer to the question of nothingness. In the religion of Daoism, nothingness has become a fundamental concept. Daoism sees contemplation in the realm of nothingness as a way to understand existence. Daoist thinkers are constantly attempting to comprehend life and existence in relation to emptiness and non-existence; In fact, in this religion, non-existence is a prerequisite for those who are delayed in the concept of existence. The ideas of dualism and the concept of nothingness have been able to permeate various cultural forms throughout Chinese history. Clearly, traces of this notion is perceived in the schools of Chinese painting, and one can find a reflection of Daoist thoughts in their artworks. Our aim in this study is to follow the signs of the nothingness theory in the works of one of the greatest painters of the era of the rule of the South Song dynasty (1279-1127 AD) by the name of Mayoan (1225-1160 AD). In this study, ten artworks of Mayoan are selected and examined using a descriptive-analytical method. The results of the research indicate that the theory of nothingness has penetrated deeply into South Song's periodic painting and have been transferred to later periods in the form of a significant artistic tradition.

## Research aims:

1. Examining the concept of nothingness and emptiness in Daoism and its effect on Chinese painting.
2. Examining the concept of nothingness and emptiness during Mayoan's work.

## Research questions:

1. What effect has the concept of Daoist nothingness had on the art of Chinese painting?
2. How is the concept of nothingness manifested in Mayoan works?

## Introduction

In a Chinese landscape painting, the blanks may be more noticeable than anything else. If a page or background is an arena for art and creation, why should a painter leave large parts of it empty or paint the details of the universe with fog painting? This question has been constantly considered and much has been addressed. The reason for this is that Chinese artists have belonged to Daoist teachings at some point in history, which has eventually become an art tradition and experience among them; as it is today, this subject is an integral part of Chinese painting.

Throughout history, many intellectual and religious systems have studied the concept of nothingness and emptiness and studied it from various perspectives and achieved different results. One of the rituals that

attaches great importance to the subject of non-existence is the Dao religion. The influence of Daoism in Chinese society and the importance of nothingness and emptiness in it, has caused Chinese artists to reflect the doctrine of emptiness in their works. In periods of Chinese civilization, such as during the reign of the Southern Song Dynasty, Dao's ideas gained much popularity among works of art. In general, the rise of the Song dynasty made painting a special art of the court. In this type of paintings, which was moving towards maturity and evolution, designs and themes taken from natural elements were simply considered and emphasized (Mazaheri et al., 2010: 9). On the other hand, in the Chinese poetry, music and painting of this period, one can see the presence of Dao ideas such as the idea of nothingness. At a time when Chinese culture and art were flourishing, Chinese painters created remarkable works in which large parts of their image were dominated by the idea of non-existence and other teachings of Dao.

The Mongol dynasty destroyed the ancient Chinese dynasty, but their artistic and cultural traditions remained. The experiences and artistic heritage of China, during the Mongol period, were transferred to Iran and West Asia and had a great impact on Iranian painting. Following the painting of the patriarchal period, the traces of Chinese painting can be traced. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct studies in Iran on the origins of Chinese painting to show what meanings and teachings were used in China to create the imported techniques used in Iranian painting. Such a necessity necessitates a study of the paintings of the famous Chinese artist, Mayuan. According to the researches, no investigation has been done on the present subject so far and in fact no independent research has specifically studied one of the Chinese painters. In this sense, this research is an innovation. In this study, by examining ten works of Mayan with an analytical-descriptive method, we have tried to show the influence of Daoist teachings in the painting of the Southern Song period and to answer the questions of what effect the concept of Daoist non-existence has on the art of Chinese painting; and that is has Maywan's work manifested itself?

## **Conclusion**

The Southern Song dynasty was a cultured and art-loving court, which we can to some extent compare to the court of the Timurids of Central Asia, the Gurkhani Indians, or the Safavids of Isfahan. During this period, Chinese culture and art flourished. Just as the Manichaeans had previously used art in the service of their ideological propaganda, so at this time painting became an arena for ideological propaganda. Painters, who seemed to see words as incomplete and insufficient to convey the subtle meaning of nothingness and emptiness, saw art as a suitable tool for this purpose, and, as we shall see in later centuries. The Southern Song court provided an arena for artists whose visual beauty and ideological propaganda of the Dao were two simultaneous tasks. During this period, there were many painters who succeeded in this "noble art" and among them, Mayoan shone very brightly and attracted the attention of Nick the Emperor and other nobles. Using his own techniques, Mayuan was able to combine Daoist nihilism with Chinese painting and demonstrate his ritual ideas about the importance of nihilism. He also trained a group of gifted students who institutionalized their master's experiences in Chinese culture, and in this way we see that Daoist teachings have been able to continue in the history of Chinese art.

The period of activity of Mayuan and his disciples coincided with the terrible invasion of the Mongols. But this art was mature enough to attract the attention of these newcomers. The sinister wave of the Mongol invasion also passed through Iran and reached Eastern Europe. But when the thirst of this people was quenched, the legacy of Mayoan emerged from the court of the Ilkhans, and painters were found who painted the stories of the Iranian prophets and kings in the same style and context. Today, we can browse through books such as *The Society of Chronicles* (Edinburgh Edition) or the *Great Ilkhanid Shahnameh*

(Demot Edition) to see the valuable experience of painters such as Mayo, who were able to write about nothingness for the first time. In fact, his art and experience of incorporating the teachings of Dao was transferred to Iran and southwest Asia by the Mongols without his knowledge or expectation.

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Image sources:

Figure 1:

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ma\\_Yuan-Banquet\\_by\\_Lantern\\_Light.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ma_Yuan-Banquet_by_Lantern_Light.jpg)

Figure 2:

<http://www.clevelandart.org/art/1997.88>

Figure 3:

<https://www.mfa.org/collections/object/scholars-conversing-beneath-blossoming-plum-tree-28229>

Figure 4:

<http://www.chinaonlinemuseum.com/painting-ma-yuan-6.php>

Figure 5:

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Figure 6:

<https://www.comuseum.com/painting/masters/ma-yuan/>

Figure 7:

Source: Gardner, 2007: 717

Figure 8:

<https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/1973.120.9/>

Figure 9:

Bamboo and Ducks by a Rushing Stream

Figure 10:

<http://www.clevelandart.org/art/1997.89>