

## Spiritual Reflection in Song Dynasty Calligraphy: A Zen Aesthetic Analysis

Tongliang Ma

PhD student, Department of Fine Arts, International College, Krirk University,  
Bangkok, 10220, Thailand

[mtl0321@163.com](mailto:mtl0321@163.com)

<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-6808-0516>

**Abstract:** Zen Buddhist aesthetics provide a framework for understanding Song Dynasty calligraphy, where principles such as spontaneity, impermanence, non-duality, emptiness, and effortless action are reflected in brushwork, composition, and artistic execution. Calligraphy was not merely an artistic form but a meditative and philosophical discipline, embodying Zen ideals of spontaneous movement and intuitive awareness. Each stroke embodied the artist's present state of awareness, transforming calligraphy into a spiritual exercise rooted in Zen thought. This study examines how Zen philosophy shaped artistic execution and creative intent in Song Dynasty calligraphy, exploring the balance between control and spontaneity. A key objective is to compare Zen and Western artistic traditions, analyzing how Zen aesthetics challenge conventional notions of intentionality, authorship, and artistic mastery. The study also investigates how negative space (*Śūnyatā*) functions as an active compositional force and how logical modeling can explain the paradox of artistic spontaneity and control. A historical-philosophical and aesthetic approach integrates textual analysis of Zen and calligraphic treatises, semiotic interpretation of brushstrokes, and logical modeling to examine artistic intentionality. Computational tools such as Python (Matplotlib) are used for visual analysis, merging traditional aesthetic inquiry with contemporary data visualization methodologies. The study finds that Song calligraphy embodies Zen's non-dualistic approach, where artistic mastery arises through mindful creation rather than rigid control. Negative space plays an active role in composition, and logical models demonstrate how Zen calligraphy dissolves dualistic constraints. This research offers a unique integration of Zen aesthetics, comparative philosophy, and computational modeling, advancing discussions on artistic intentionality, spontaneity, and meditative creativity in both historical and contemporary artistic contexts.

**Keywords:** Zen Aesthetics, Song Dynasty Calligraphy, Spontaneity, Artistic Intentionality, Mindfulness

### 1. INTRODUCTION

China's changing intellectual and cultural landscape shaped Chinese calligraphy's artistic and philosophical heights during the Song Dynasty (960–1279) (Wang, 2023). This is when scholar-artists and literati turned to calligraphy as a form of self-expression and meditation. The Song

Dynasty's emphasis on artistic refinement, literary culture, and philosophical inquiry made calligraphy a deeply introspective and expressive art form with aesthetic sensibility, spontaneity, and spiritual depth (Bogdanova-Kummer, 2025; Sernelj, 2021). The Song Dynasty promoted calligraphy as a personal, contemplative, and philosophical practice linked to Zen Buddhism, unlike previous dynasties. Su Shi (1037–1101), Huang Tingjian (1045–1105), Mi Fu (1051–1107), and Zhang Jizhi (1186–1263) show Song Dynasty calligraphy's individualism and abandonment of formalism. In line with the Zen principle of Ziran (自然, naturalness), calligraphers emphasized movement, rhythm, and spontaneity for effortless artistic creation. Their fluid strokes, dynamic brushplay, and intuitive balance between ink and empty space reflect their technical mastery and philosophical understanding of impermanence, non-duality, and self-transcendence (Qi, 2023). Song calligraphers preferred a freer, more personal style that captured spontaneous expression and inner contemplation, unlike Tang Dynasty calligraphers who emphasized structured brush control (Guan, 2024). Their brushstrokes reflected the Zen Buddhist belief that true art comes from a mind free from attachment and self-conscious effort, expressing their thoughts, emotions, and meditative states (Min, 2022). Zen art and calligraphy in China changed dramatically during the Song Dynasty, reflecting spiritual and aesthetic changes. Zen Buddhism, which stressed direct experience, spontaneity, and non-dualistic perception, influenced Chinese calligraphy from the Tang Dynasty (618–907) (Tanahashi & O'Leary, 2022). Over perfection and rigidity, Zen aesthetics values spontaneity and intuition. Wu Wei (無為, effortless action), a Daoist concept centuries before Zen, does not fully encompass the spiritual and philosophical aspects of Zen calligraphy. Wu Nian (無念), the Zen concept of thoughtlessness, aligns with Song Dynasty calligraphy's emphasis on spontaneity and direct expression. This framework helps artists flow by letting their brushwork emerge without attachment or manipulation. The artist meditates with each stroke, showing his inner state and technical mastery without force. Song Dynasty calligraphy embraced Zen's non-duality (不二, Bu Er) by eschewing rigid formalism for spontaneous, mindful expression. Zen calligraphy sees emptiness (Sūnyatā, 空) as a dynamic force shaping meaning through the balance between inked strokes and unpainted space. Zen believed in impermanence (無常, Wú Cháng) and the interconnectedness of all elements in art, as reflected in the interaction between presence and absence. Zen-inspired Song Dynasty calligraphy was superior. This art

form and meditation reflect Zen's deepest philosophical truths through form and formlessness, control and spontaneity, intention and uncontrived expression.

Zen philosophy is reflected in Song Dynasty calligraphy, where each brushstroke reflects the artist's meditation and present moment (Baihua, 2023; Li, 2022). Zen aesthetics is relevant in Chinese art, especially calligraphy, because it transcends artistic boundaries and shifts perspective on the artist, medium, and creative process. Zen art emphasizes spontaneity, imperfection, and the dynamic interaction between ink and empty space, unlike Western art theories that emphasize mimesis, compositional symmetry, and formal precision (Jia, 2024). Spaces left untouched by the brush are as important as strokes in Zen calligraphy, symbolizing that emptiness shapes meaning. Zen sees absence and presence, control and spontaneity, form and formlessness as complementary realities (Chen & Dewancker, 2024; YI, 2023). The Song Dynasty calligraphers' internalization and expression of Zen aesthetics warrants a deeper philosophical and aesthetic analysis. Song calligraphy's Zen philosophy has not been studied as much as its brush techniques, compositional structure, and stylistic evolution. The paradox of intentionality versus spontaneity in art challenges aesthetic philosophy and practice. If calligraphy requires skill and discipline, how can it embody Wu Wei, Zen's effortless action? This contradiction raises important questions about artistic agency, intuition in creative expression, and mastery vs. spontaneity (Li, 2022; Qi, 2023). Zen thought is used to study Song Dynasty calligraphy's aesthetic, philosophical, and conceptual aspects. Further it examines how Song calligraphers' brushwork reflects Zen values like emptiness, spontaneity, non-duality, and ease. The study will also compare Zen calligraphy to Western aesthetic theories, particularly those that emphasize intentional composition, formal precision, and structured artistic expression, to show Zen aesthetics' unique contributions to art philosophy (Chen & Dewancker, 2024; YI, 2023). It derives that Song Dynasty calligraphy is a meditative practice that explores existential and metaphysical questions. This research reinterprets art theory, philosophy, and creativity beyond calligraphy to explore artistic intentionality, spontaneity, and awareness. This work enhances philosophy-art understanding, particularly in non-Western traditions, by examining how Zen thought affected Song Dynasty art (Wang, 2023; Zhang, 2024). Zen calligraphy challenges Formalism, Intentionalism, and Expressionism by demonstrating that creative mastery requires disciplined competence and

intuitive spontaneity. Zen calligraphy values fluidity and naturalism over Formalism. Intentionalism relates meaning to conscious writing, although Wu Wei reconciles spontaneity and intention in Zen aesthetics. Zen calligraphy promotes meditation and existential awareness, unlike Expressionism (Song et al., 2025). Zen calligraphy's intentionality-spontaneity logical paradoxes enrich modern art debates concerning intuition, competence, and the unconscious. Zen calligraphy promotes mindfulness over control and presents a convincing alternative to digital and artificial intelligence's redefining artistic authorship and originality. Song Dynasty calligraphy embodies Zen Buddhism's deepest truths about impermanence, awareness, and creativity. Song calligraphers' spontaneity and purpose in brushwork demonstrate how creativity, self-expression, and spirituality are intertwined. This study situates Zen aesthetics in historical and current art debates to demonstrate that brush knowledge transcends ink and paper, extending into discussions on creativity, presence, and artistic intentionality in a changing world.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Philosophical Foundations of Aesthetics in Calligraphy

Mimesis, formalism, and artistic intent dominate art's nature, perception, and evaluation in analytic aesthetics. Zen calligraphy prefers spontaneity, imperfection, and ink-empty space interaction to precision (Wang, 2023; Xing, 2023). Zen calligraphy, which emphasizes non-duality (Bu Er) and transience, prioritises artist authenticity and brushwork harmony over formal accuracy. This makes calligraphy a unique aesthetic practice with visual and creative meaning. Calligraphers express themselves philosophically and artistically. Unlike Western art, Zen calligraphy values writing as much as the finished piece. Brushstroke fluidity, ink rhythm, and stroke quality give the work aesthetic and philosophical meaning (Du, 2021; Wang, 2024). According to the principle of Ziran (自然, natural spontaneity), artists attain true artistic expression by aligning with nature's movement. Meditative practice and Zen calligraphy reinforce the idea that art emerges naturally without conscious thought. Zen aesthetics relies on the concept of Wu Wei (無為, effortless action) from Daoism and Zen Buddhism. It says mastery is achieved without force or ego (Wang, 2024). Wu Wei in Zen calligraphy means natural brush movement without overcorrection. This principle contradicts Western ideas of artistic mastery,

which emphasize discipline and control, by suggesting that true artistic refinement occurs when the artist lets the artwork unfold naturally (Du, 2021). Wu Wei implies conscious precision and spontaneity. Song Dynasty calligraphers internalized Wu Wei as an aesthetic and philosophical principle in their effortless yet precise brushwork (Xing, 2023). Zen art links spirituality and art through intuition and spontaneity. Zen calligraphy should be left alone and reflects the calligrapher's mood. Zen calligraphy accepts imperfections as part of its authenticity, unlike Western art, which starts with sketches and revisions. The Zen principle of impermanence (無常, wú cháng) acknowledges that everything is temporary. Thus, every brushstroke is unique, emphasizing life's transience. Zen calligraphy values spontaneity, asymmetry, and movement over form (Deng, 2020; Huang, 2022; Pang, 2023).

## 2.2 Zen Buddhist Influence on Song Dynasty Calligraphy

Chan (Zen) During the Tang and Song Dynasties, when Zen dominated spiritual and intellectual life, Buddhism influenced Song Dynasty calligraphy. Zen Buddhism developed artistic and literary traditions through direct experience, meditation, and non-dualistic perception, unlike earlier Buddhist traditions that studied texts and rituals. Traditional Chinese calligraphy was used by Zen monks and scholars to express spiritual insights through momentary awareness and meditative engagement with the present (Wang, 2024; Xing, 2023). Zen concepts like impermanence, emptiness, and mindfulness influenced Song Dynasty calligraphy. Buddhist impermanence—that everything changes—influenced calligraphers. Knowing no two strokes were alike, Zen calligraphers saw each stroke as a fleeting expression of existence (Deng, 2020). Zen calligraphy views emptiness (Śūnyatā) as an active component, highlighting the interdependence of form and formlessness. Zen aesthetics emphasizes the dynamic relationship between ink and the void and the meaning of empty space. Western art values form, emphasizing structure, representation, and defined composition as essential elements of artistic expression. Finally, writing is a meditation because the calligrapher concentrates on each stroke, breath, and brush movement (Huang, 2022; Pang, 2023). In calligraphy and composition, Zen aesthetics valued fluidity, rhythm, and spontaneity over formalism (Smrz, 2024). Song Dynasty calligraphers like Su Shi, Huang Tingjian, and Mi Fu preferred expressive, deeply personal styles that reflected their inner state over beauty standards.

They demonstrate how Zen calligraphy is a meditative practice that brings the brushstroke into focus. Writing and Zen principles like mindfulness, impermanence, and effortless action are inextricably linked in Song Dynasty calligraphy. This supports the idea that artistic mastery involves blending creativity with life's rhythm (Du, 2021; Wang, 2023; Wang, 2024). Many studies have examined the stylistic evolution, technical aspects, and historical significance of key Song Dynasty calligraphers, focusing on brushwork, stroke composition, and script variations (Deng, 2020; Du, 2021; Xing, 2023). Scholars have shown that Confucianism and Daoism shaped Chinese calligraphy. Research shows that impermanence, spontaneity, and mindfulness influenced Chinese poetry, painting, and Chan Buddhist ink-wash art (Pang, 2023; Smrz, 2024; Wang, 2024). Despite these valuable contributions, Zen Buddhist literature on Song Dynasty calligraphy's philosophical and aesthetic analysis is scarce. Despite its spiritual significance, there is no systematic theoretical framework on how Zen principles such as Wu Wei (effortless action), Ziran (natural spontaneity), and Śūnyatā (emptiness) manifest in Chinese calligraphy. No detailed comparison of Zen aesthetics and Western artistic theories limits discourse, leaving unanswered questions about how Zen calligraphy balances artistic intentionality and spontaneity (Deng, 2020; Du, 2021; Xing, 2023).

Chinese Zen aesthetics studies generally neglect calligraphy as a philosophical endeavor in favor of painting and poetry. Zen calligraphers used brushwork as a type of meditation, but little is known about how they internalized non-dualistic thought and articulated it via art for self-cultivation and existential insight (Huang, 2022; Smrz, 2024). The logical and semiotic aspects of Zen calligraphy, especially the balance between artistic spontaneity and control, are understudied. Calligraphy of the Song Dynasty is both beautiful and philosophical, reflecting Zen's metaphysics. Understanding how calligraphy combines artistic mastery, self-expression, and Zen meditation enhances our understanding of Zen aesthetics and its impact on art theory, creativity, and philosophy (Dahlkemper, 2023; Jiwu, 2023; Wu, 2020).

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Analytic philosophy, aesthetics, comparative philosophy, and Zen Buddhism are used to investigate Song Dynasty calligraphy's spiritual and aesthetic aspects. The qualitative, hermeneutic, and comparative study

examines how Zen concepts like emptiness, spontaneity, and effortless action are mirrored in calligraphy, composition, and creative intent. The study uses philosophical aesthetics, semiotics, and phenomenology to investigate Zen-inspired calligraphy's sensory and interpretative components. Three analytical phases are used in the study. First, thorough textual study is needed to derive aesthetic and philosophical notions from ancient calligraphic treatises and Zen Buddhist scriptures. The second portion examines how calligraphic styles reflect Zen values using analytic philosophy of art, perceptual theory, and semiotics. The final section places Song Dynasty calligraphy in a philosophical perspective by comparing Zen calligraphy to Western ideas of artistic expression, intentionality, and aesthetic experience. The study is philosophically rigorous, historically contextualized, and cross-culturally comparable using this triadic approach (Jeffrey, 2024). This study analyzes philosophy, aesthetics, and art history, hence the sample size and dataset are historical and textual. Primary sources include Sun Guoting's *Shu Pu*, Huang Tingjian's *Ping Fu Tie*, Su Shi's calligraphy, and Zhao Mengfu's artistic practice dissertations. These texts show how Song Dynasty intellectuals and artists saw calligraphy's spiritual and aesthetic qualities. Zen Buddhist literature including *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō*, and Sengcan's *Xinxin Ming* (Faith in Mind) discuss artistic spontaneity, embodiment, and aesthetic transcendence. The analysis has theoretical depth and interdisciplinary viewpoints from Chinese art history, Zen aesthetics, and comparative philosophical aesthetics (Poškaitė, 2020). Because aesthetic interpretation requires conceptual clarity and logical coherence, this research's philosophical paradigm is valid. Zen aesthetics is experiential and non-discursive, thus the study uses formal logic and dialectical reasoning to explain its theoretical basis in analytic philosophy. The seeming contradiction between planned creative invention and spontaneous expression in Zen calligraphy challenges ontological and epistemological principles in this study. Zen aesthetics rejected binary oppositions and embraced form and formlessness, which can be captured by a non-classical logical paradigm. This can be expressed as:

$$\neg(P \vee \neg P) \rightarrow (P \wedge \neg P)$$

The letter P represents intentional artistic action, while  $\neg P$  represents unintentional spontaneity. This model suggests Zen calligraphy values intentionality and spontaneity over dualistic logic. The study examines how calligraphy's negative space (kōng, 空) represents emptiness, a key Zen concept, through semiotic analysis. Formally modeling the calligraphic balance between fullness (ink) and emptiness (void) can be followed as:

Aesthetic Meaning = f (I,V)

I (inked strokes) and V (void/negative space) shape viewer perception and interpretation, aligning with the Zen principle of mutual arising (pratītyasamutpāda).

- Intellectual integrity, cultural sensitivity, and methodological transparency are ethical concerns for this research. This study uses historical and religious texts to avoid anachronistic or ethnocentric biases, accurate translation, and contextual interpretation. Zen philosophy emphasizes direct experience and non-conceptual wisdom, so theoretical discourse cannot fully capture Zen artistic practice. Historical interpretations must acknowledge Zen calligraphy's constantly changing nature as an artistic tradition for ethical reasons. The research is transparent and rigorous because all sources are attributed and multiple scholarly perspectives are considered. Analytic philosophy, comparative aesthetics, Zen Buddhist thought, and formal logical analysis are used to study Song Dynasty calligraphy as art and meditation (Li, 2025). Calligraphic Treatises and Essays by Song Dynasty Masters (Pang, 2023).
- Song Dynasty calligraphy research must correct traditional source references for historical accuracy. The book "Shan Gu Lun Shu" (山谷论书) reflects Huang Tingjian's calligraphy theory, including his brushwork styles, artistic expression, and philosophical foundations. Su Shi (1037-1101), a prominent Song Dynasty calligrapher, is recognized for his literary contributions, but his theoretical reflections on calligraphy should be cited from "Dongpo Tiba" (东坡题跋) rather than the "Collected Writings on Calligraphy and Painting." The celebrated Song period calligrapher Mi Fu (1051–1107) is renowned for his expressive brushwork and theoretical contribution in "Hai Yue Ming Yan" (海岳名言), which showcases his unique perspectives on calligraphy, spontaneity, and aesthetic judgment.
- Zhang Jizhi (张即之), a Southern Song calligrapher known for his regular script and meditative compositions, is the more accurate historical reference for Song Dynasty calligraphy, despite influencing later literati interpretations. \*\*The critical text "Song Xuezhai Shu Lun" (松雪斋书论) exemplifies Zhao Mengfu's theoretical contributions in calligraphy and artistic philosophy. Thus, historical



accuracy and proper source attribution improve Song Dynasty calligraphy research and help us understand how calligraphers viewed the art form in their philosophical and cultural contexts.

- Zen Buddhist Texts for Philosophical Foundations (Bogdanova-Kummer, 2025)
  - *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* (六祖壇經, a core Chan/Zen Buddhist text on enlightenment and artistic spontaneity)
  - *Dōgen's Shōbōgenzō* (正法眼藏, particularly sections on aesthetic perception and action)
  - *Sengcan's Xinxin Ming* (信心銘, "Faith in Mind"), which discusses non-duality and its relation to perception
- Calligraphic Artworks (Visual Analysis of Styles and Techniques) (Chen & Dewancker, 2024; YI, 2023)
  - Huang Tingjian's Wild Cursive Scripts (for spontaneity in Zen aesthetics)
  - Su Shi's "Cold Food Observance" Calligraphy (an example of self-expression and Zen meditation in brushwork)
  - Mi Fu's Running Script Calligraphy (demonstrates Zen-inspired personal freedom in brush technique)

This study could benefit from using Zhang Jizhi (张即之), a skilled calligrapher from the Southern Song Dynasty. His calligraphy reflects Song Dynasty aesthetics and philosophy. Southern Song literati values crisp, disciplined writing like Zhang Jizhi's. He included Buddhist scriptures in his calligraphy, demonstrating his religious and philosophical interests, but his theories are scarce. However, his preserved works show Song calligraphy's technical refinement and meditative brushwork. Zhang Jizhi is a better Song Dynasty calligraphy reference than Zhao Mengfu, whose contributions are significant but belong to the Yuan Dynasty in art. These sources provide direct insights into the artistic, spiritual, and philosophical dimensions of calligraphy as a meditative practice. These secondary sources provide theoretical grounding, allowing the research to connect Song Dynasty calligraphy with broader philosophical debates on artistic spontaneity, meaning, and perception. It primarily employs Python for data visualization and semiotic modeling, using Matplotlib for graphical representations of brushstroke analysis, logical modeling, and conceptual diagrams.

ATLAS.ti is used for qualitative text analysis to categorize historical Zen philosophical themes and calligraphic principles. It examines how Zen

aesthetics affected Song Dynasty calligraphy through textual analysis, visual semiotic interpretation, and comparative philosophy. A hermeneutic analysis of Zen Buddhist and calligraphic texts highlights the significance of concepts such as Śūnyatā (emptiness), Ziran (spontaneity), and Wu Wei (effortlessness) in artistic execution. Second, historical calligraphic works are visually and semiotically analyzed for brushstroke dynamics, ink dispersion, negative space, and compositional rhythm, which indicate intentional and spontaneous artistic movement. Using a semiotic model, fullness (ink) and void (empty space) are linked to demonstrate Zen's mutual dependency in creative perception. Third, intentionality, representation, and structured composition are compared in Zen and Western art. Logical modeling reveals how Zen calligraphy resolves the control-spontaneity dilemma by combining controlled artistic skill with spontaneous creativity.

#### 4. ANALYSIS/ARGUMENTATION

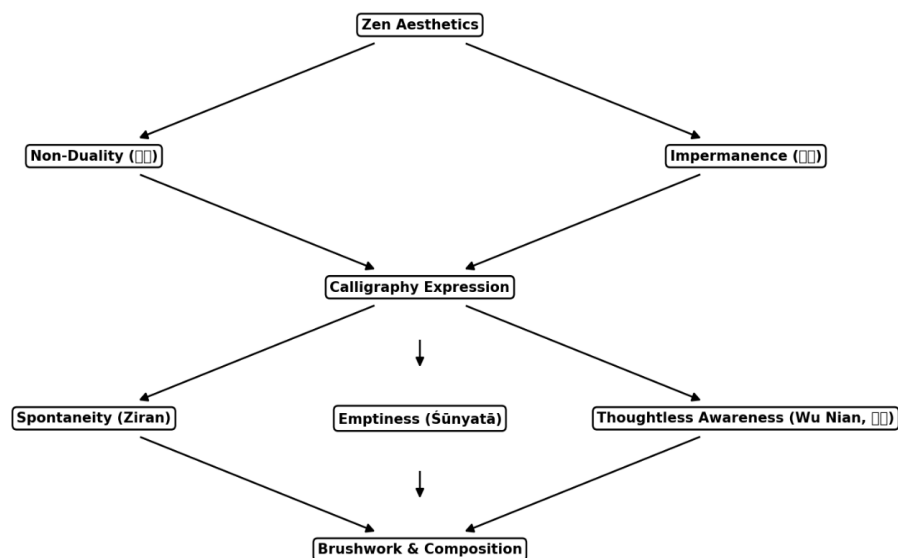
##### 4.1 Conceptual Analysis of Zen Aesthetics in Song Dynasty Calligraphy

Zen philosophy's emphasis on naturalness, impermanence, and non-duality influenced Song Dynasty calligraphy. Each brushstroke balances control and spontaneity, making Zen aesthetics a meditative and intellectual exercise rather than an art form. Western art emphasizes mimesis and formal structure, while Zen aesthetics emphasizes spontaneity, emptiness, and effortless action. These principles underpinned Song Dynasty calligraphy. These existential principles, rooted in Zen Buddhist philosophy, combine art and meditation into one uncontrived action. Zen-influenced calligraphers are expected to practice mindfulness, detachment from self-conscious control, and intuitive brush movement to create a unique blend of intentionality and spontaneity that defines their aesthetic quality.

Table 1: Key Zen Aesthetic Principles in Song Dynasty Calligraphy

Zen Aesthetic Principle	Meaning and Calligraphic Manifestation
Emptiness (Śūnyatā)	Negative space (kōng, 空) is as important as ink. Emphasizes impermanence, balance, and fluidity in artistic expression.
Spontaneity (Ziran)	Brushstrokes should flow naturally, without over-calculation. Calligraphy embodies unforced, organic movement.
Thoughtless Awareness (Wu Nian, 无念)	Free from attachment and deliberation, true artistic mastery emerges. With no effort or overcorrection, the brush captures the artist's pure presence and meditative stillness.

Song Dynasty calligraphy emphasizes spontaneity, mindfulness, presence, and absence according to Zen principles (Table 1). Negative space (kōng, 空) interacting with inked strokes creates a dynamic compositional force called emptiness (Sūnyatā, 空). The Zen concept of impermanence (無常, Wú Cháng) is reflected in the interplay between form and void, as each brushstroke is unique and fleeting, emphasizing the transient nature of The unpainted areas give the composition life, proving that words and silence have meaning. Song Dynasty calligraphers' spontaneous brushstrokes reflect Zen's rejection of deliberate force and the principle of natural spontaneity (Ziran, 自然). Calligraphers instinctively move brushes to flow ink. Zen emphasizes thoughtless awareness (Wu Nian, 无念), free from attachment and self-conscious effort, fostering true artistic expression through direct experience and uncontrived action. This method masters art by intuitively brushing and letting strokes emerge. Song calligraphers accepted imperfection and asymmetry like Zen accepted spontaneity and irregularity. Painting was meditation, writing self-improvement and existential reflection. Thus, Song Dynasty calligraphy became a profound philosophical practice that contrasted control and spontaneity, presence and absence, movement and stillness. Zen calligraphy is a spiritual and artistic practice that shares Zen thought through peaceful imagery.



**Figure 1:** Conceptual Model of Zen Aesthetics in Calligraphy

As shown in Figure 1, the Conceptual Model of Zen Aesthetics applies Zen philosophy to calligraphy. Zen aesthetics emphasizes Non-Duality (不二) and Impermanence (無常), which influence calligraphy. According to Non-Duality (不二), artistic creation should not be limited by rigid

distinctions such as form and emptiness, control and spontaneity, or intention and accident. It harmonizes mind, body, and movement by making each brushstroke an unplanned extension of the calligrapher's inner state. Impermanence (無常) emphasizes authenticity over perfection, highlighting the transient nature of existence. Calligraphy is guided by Zen principles such as spontaneity, emptiness, and thoughtlessness (Ziran, 自然, Sūnyatā, 空, Wu Nian, 无念). Brush movement should be natural and unforced (Ziran, 自然). Emptiness (Sūnyatā, 空) highlights the dynamic balance between ink and void, emphasizing missing elements in composition. Calligraphers can execute strokes effortlessly without self-conscious interference using the concept of Thoughtless Awareness (Wu Nian, 无念). Zen philosophy influences calligraphy's form, rhythm, and structure through brushwork and composition. This conceptual model shows that Zen calligraphy is a meditative practice that embodies Zen wisdom through its balance of presence and emptiness, spontaneity and stillness, discipline and freedom.

#### 4.2 Historical-Philosophical Inquiry into Song Dynasty Calligraphers

Table 2(a): Song Dynasty Calligraphers and Their Zen Aesthetic Contributions

Calligrapher	Zen Aesthetic Influence	Notable Calligraphic Style	Philosophical Contribution
Huang Tingjian (1045-1105)	Emphasized spontaneity and self-expression; known for free-flowing cursive script reflecting Zen non-attachment.	Wild cursive script with bold, unpredictable strokes.	Calligraphy as an extension of self-cultivation; believed in writing as a reflection of Zen enlightenment.
Su Shi (1037-1101)	Integrated poetry, calligraphy, and Zen philosophy; promoted unforced, natural brushwork as an extension of mindfulness.	Semi-cursive style, integrating poetry and fluid calligraphy.	Advocated artistic freedom and emotional spontaneity; saw calligraphy as a meditative act rather than rigid discipline.
Zhang Jizhi (1186-1263)	Specialized in regular script, focusing on disciplined yet natural execution, maintaining structural clarity while incorporating fluidity.	Regular script with a refined, balanced structure emphasizing meditative precision.	Maintained a structured yet spontaneous approach, reflecting the Zen principle of balance between form and emptiness.

Table 2(b): Song Dynasty Calligraphers and Their Zen Aesthetic Contributions

Calligrapher	Zen Aesthetic Influence	Notable Calligraphic Style	Philosophical Contribution
Mi Fu (1051-1107)	Advocated for eccentric, highly expressive brushwork; rejected rigid structures, embodying Zen's rejection of dualism.	Unconventional and highly individualized cursive script.	Challenged aesthetic norms; embodied Zen eccentricity through unpredictable, dynamic brushwork.

Table 2 shows how famous Song Dynasty calligraphers used Zen aesthetics, demonstrating that calligraphy was both a visual art and a spiritual practice. Inspired by Zen philosophy, their art emphasises spontaneity, emptiness, and thoughtlessness (Wu Nian, 无念) as key elements of artistic expression. Huang Tingjian's wild cursive script embodies Zen non-attachment, with intuitive brushstrokes. Each stroke of his calligraphy expresses Zen thought's spontaneity. The poet and calligrapher Su Shi depicted life's transience with expressive strokes. His Zen-like ease of expression enhances calligraphy's meditative quality. Like Zen, regular script master Zhang Jizhi balanced discipline and spontaneity. To support the Zen paradox that form and formlessness are interdependent, his refined yet uncontrived brushwork shows precision and freedom in art. Mi Fu's unconventional cursive script reflected Zen's rejection of dualism. As Zen valued unpredictability and imperfection, his unconventional brushwork emphasised instinctive creativity over calculated execution. Their diverse styles demonstrate that Zen calligraphy is more than art—it is a path to philosophical inquiry, self-cultivation, and meditative awareness, guided by Zen's core principles.

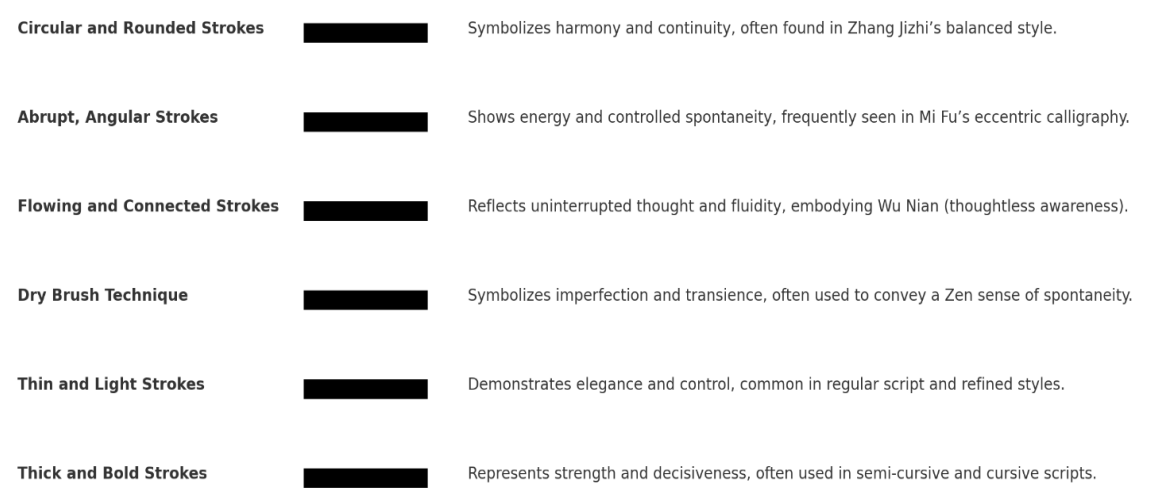


Figure 2: Calligraphic Brushstroke Analysis

Song Dynasty calligraphers' brushstrokes conveyed Meditation, Zen spontaneity, discipline, and philosophical depth (Figure 2). Calligraphy is both an art and a meditation, with each stroke demonstrating technical skill and philosophy. Bold strokes in semi-cursive and cursive scripts show confidence and unrestrained motion, expressing the artist's spontaneity. Regular script balances structure and expression with thin, light strokes. Zen's acceptance of imperfection and transience, as shown by the dry brush technique's uneven ink distribution, emphasises raw, unfiltered beauty. Zen art emphasises non-resistance with natural brushstrokes. Calligraphers' flowing strokes evoke Wu Nian (无念), a state of uninterrupted thought and effortless action, immersing them in the present moment. Mi Fu's energetic, angular brushstrokes capture Zen's structured spontaneity and instinctive movement that defies art tradition. Finally, Zhang Jizhi's circular and rounded strokes express harmony and balance, supporting Zen's view of movement and stillness, form and emptiness. These brushstrokes demonstrate Song Dynasty calligraphy's importance beyond aesthetics, reflecting Zen's impermanence, mindfulness, and intuitive expression.

#### 4.3 Comparative Study of Zen and Western Aesthetic Theories

Table 3(a): Comparative Analysis of Zen Calligraphy and Western Aesthetic Theories

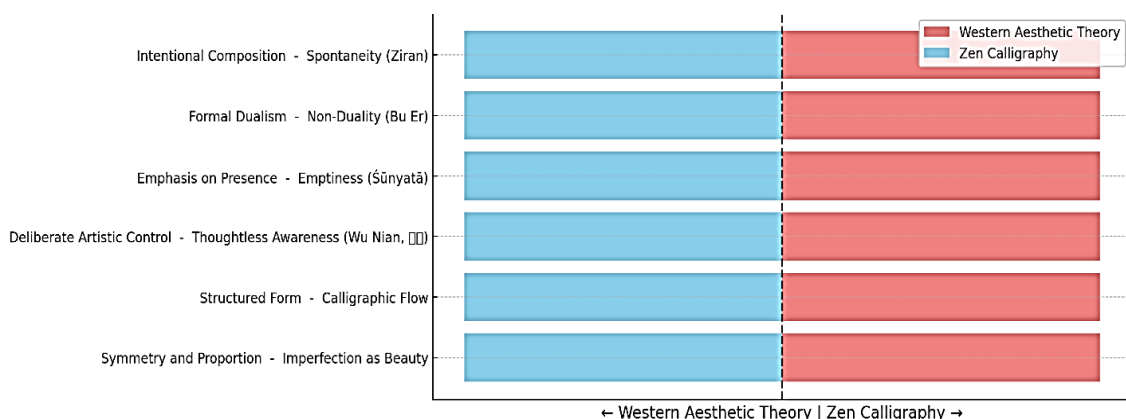
Aspect	Zen Calligraphy	Western Aesthetic Theories
Artistic Intent	Focuses on intuitive creation; the artist lets the brush move naturally, aligning with Wu Wei (effortless action).	Emphasizes deliberate artistic intention; form and structure are carefully pre-planned.
Philosophical Foundation	Rooted in Zen Buddhism; emphasizes impermanence, mindfulness, and non-duality.	Rooted in classical philosophy (Plato, Aristotle) and later aesthetic theories; focuses on mimesis and ideal form.
Role of Spontaneity	Spontaneity is valued over precision; a calligraphic stroke should emerge freely without over-calculation.	Spontaneity is often seen as secondary to skillful execution and adherence to formal techniques.
Concept of Emptiness	Emphasizes the void (kōng, 空) as an active element; balance between ink and space reflects Zen paradox.	Negative space is considered absence rather than an active participant; primary focus is on presence and substance.

Table 3(b): Comparative Analysis of Zen Calligraphy and Western Aesthetic Theories

Aspect	Zen Calligraphy	Western Aesthetic Theories
Aesthetic Judgment	Beauty is subjective and arises from inner experience; imperfection is celebrated as part of authenticity.	Aesthetic judgment is based on formal beauty, symmetry, and proportion rather than subjective experience.
Expression vs. Form	Prioritizes expressive movement and the reflection of the artist's inner state over formal rules.	Form often dominates expression; adherence to compositional rules ensures structural harmony.
Calligraphic Execution	Brushstrokes are fluid and organic; control is exercised through non-resistance rather than rigid structure.	Execution requires technical mastery; precision and accuracy are prioritized in artistic production.

In table 3, Zen calligraphy and Western aesthetic theories differ in intent, execution, and philosophy, reflecting different art theories on creativity, form, and spontaneity. Zen calligraphy uses Wu Wei (effortless action), where the brush moves naturally. In contrast, Western aesthetics emphasize structure and technical precision. Buddhist concepts of impermanence, mindfulness, and non-duality inspire Zen calligraphy, which emphasizes the present and rejects art success and failure. In contrast, Plato and Aristotle's emphasis on mimesis (representation) and idealized form, which value skillful execution and aesthetic rules over spontaneous expression, shaped Western aesthetics. The two traditions differ on composition spontaneity and emptiness. Zen calligraphy captures the artist's mood through unrestrained brushstrokes. According to Zen emptiness (kōng, 空), negative space is an active participant in the composition, balancing inked strokes and fostering a dynamic interaction between presence and void. Western art prioritizes compositional order over spontaneity and negative space. Zen aesthetics emphasizes imperfection and authenticity, while Western aesthetics emphasizes symmetry, proportion, and formal harmony. Zen calligraphy deepens existential and metaphysical thought through meditation and philosophy, while Western aesthetics emphasizes representational accuracy and theoretical formalism. The Comparative Visualization of Zen and Western Aesthetic Principles contrasts Zen calligraphy's fluid, spontaneous nature with Western art's structured, intentional framework, highlighting

philosophical differences in artistic creation and aesthetic judgment. Zen calligraphy emphasizes Wu Wei (effortless action) by letting the brush flow (Ziran). Western aesthetics emphasizes intentional composition, where every stroke, shape, and proportion is planned to create a harmonious image. Western traditions emphasize clear boundaries between artistic elements like form and space, figure and ground, or symmetry and asymmetry, while Zen aesthetics emphasizes non-duality (Bu Er), which dissolves rigid distinctions between control and spontaneity, presence and absence, or perfection and imperfection.



**Figure 3:** Comparative Visualization of Zen and Western Aesthetic Principles

Figure 3 distinguishes Zen calligraphy from Western aesthetics, emphasising the significance of negative space (kōng, 空) in artistic composition, shaping meaning alongside inked strokes. Zen calligraphy balances ink and void, recognising that unpainted areas are as expressive as brushstrokes. Western aesthetics emphasise form, structure, and proportion. Zen calligraphy values irregularity, asymmetry, and spontaneous execution as signs of mindfulness, authenticity, and direct engagement with the present moment, while Western art values symmetry, proportional harmony, and refined technical execution as aesthetic excellence. The Zen calligraphy principle of Wu Nian (无念, Thoughtless Awareness) emphasises effortless artistic flow without over-calculation or self-conscious interference. Zen calligraphy encourages intuitive brushwork to capture the calligrapher's present state of mind. Western art often uses predefined composition and deliberate artistic control. Zen rejects rigid distinctions between control and spontaneity, suggesting that true mastery is achieved through harmonious momentary engagement. Thus, while Western aesthetics emphasise intentionality, order, and technical refinement, Zen calligraphy emphasises intuition, impermanence, fluid movement, and stillness in artistic expression.



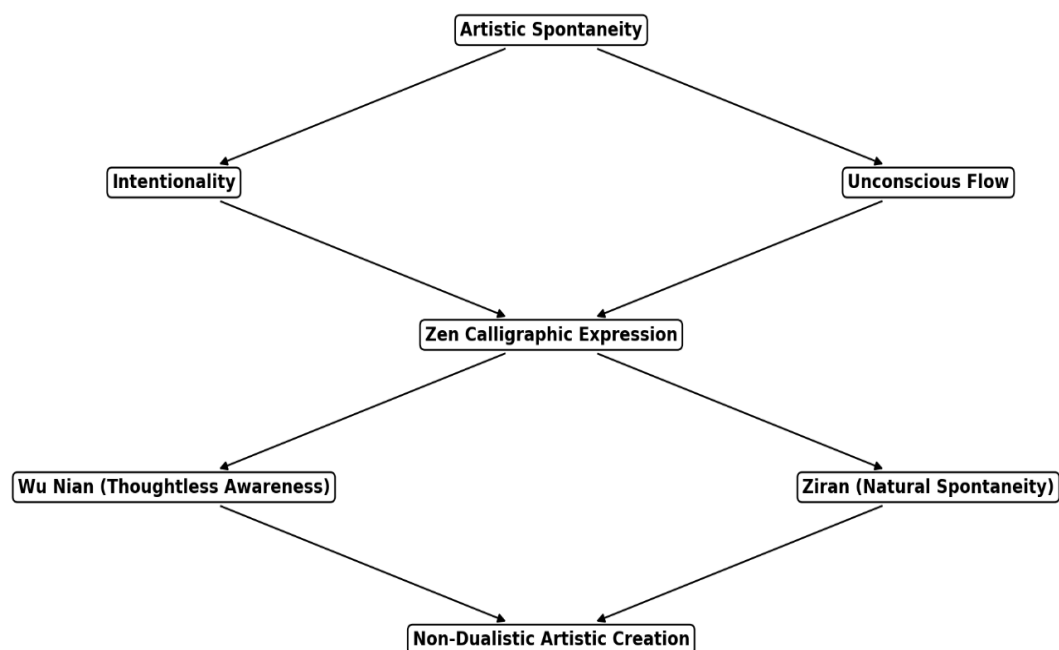
## 4.4. Semiotic and Perceptual Interpretation of Calligraphy

Table 4: Semiotic Interpretation of Calligraphy: Ink Strokes vs. Empty Space

Element	Semiotic Meaning	Philosophical Interpretation	Interaction in Calligraphy	Zen Aesthetic Principle
Ink Strokes (Yibi, 一筆, ħ, €ç¬")	Represents form, presence, and the material aspect of artistic expression; symbolizes the direct manifestation of the artist's energy and intent.	Expresses the calligrapher's movement, emotional state, and mindfulness at the moment of creation; each stroke is unique and unrepeatable, symbolizing the transient nature of existence.	Ink strokes define shape and rhythm, guiding the flow of the composition; they provide structure but depend on the surrounding space for balance.	Wu Nian (Thoughtless Awareness) – the strokes should be executed naturally, free from self-conscious control or forced correction.
Empty Space (Kōng, 空, ç©°)	Represents formlessness, absence, and openness; signifies the space in which meaning emerges, embodying Zen's concept of non-attachment and impermanence.	Symbolizes the void as an active participant in meaning-making; aligns with Buddhist Ānyatā (emptiness), demonstrating that presence is defined by absence.	Empty space counterbalances the strokes, allowing them to breathe and giving the artwork a sense of openness; it is not merely passive but co-creates meaning with the ink.	Ziran (Spontaneity) – the empty spaces should not be filled unnecessarily; their presence is as intentional as the ink strokes.

Table 4 shows the semiotic and philosophical significance of ink strokes (Yibi, 一筆) and empty space (Kōng, 空) in Zen calligraphy, emphasising their impact on artistic meaning and spiritual depth. Zen aesthetics, which emphasises negative space, aligns with the Buddhist concept of śūnyatā (emptiness, 空) and contrasts with Western aesthetics that emphasise form and structure. Zen calligraphy shows that presence and absence are complementary by using both. Ink strokes convey structure, materiality, and the artist's movement, emotion, and mindfulness. The artist uses unique strokes to symbolise the transience of the present moment and their engagement with it (Wúcháng, 無常). However, intentional voids allow the composition to breathe, balance, and flow naturally, reinforcing Zen non-attachment and openness. Blank space and ink strokes create meaning philosophically, proving that form is formlessness and silence is as meaningful as sound. Wu Nian (Wúniàn, 无念, Thoughtless Awareness) in Zen calligraphy emphasises natural strokes without self-conscious control or

forced correction, replacing effortless action (Wu Wei, 无为). Citing Zen, Ziran (自然, Spontaneity) emphasises the intentionality of empty space and avoiding unnecessary filling. These principles balance form and formlessness, reinforcing the Zen idea that true beauty and meaning come from the subtle relationship between revealed and interpreted.



**Figure 4:** Logical Diagram of Non-Duality in Artistic Spontaneity

Figure 4 shows how Zen calligraphy combines spontaneity and intention. The diagram's top shows Zen calligraphy's central paradox—whether art should be intentional or spontaneous. Zen philosophy views these as interdependent artistic spontaneity rather than opposing forces. For skilled brushwork, intention means technical discipline, artistic control, and deliberate composition. According to Taoist and Zen Buddhist principles like Wu Nian (无念, Thoughtless Awareness), unconscious flow allows meditation to lead to natural actions without self-conscious interference.

Zen Calligraphic Expression blends technical skill and loose control. After this resolution, Zen calligraphy embodies Wu Nian (Thoughtless Awareness) and Ziran (Natural Spontaneity), creating non-dualistic art with intention and spontaneity. The diagram suggests that Zen artistic mastery transcends control and freedom, making brushwork an extension of meditation and intuition. Beyond art, Zen calligraphy is a spiritual and philosophical practice that reflects impermanence and the balance between deliberate execution and spontaneous emergence.

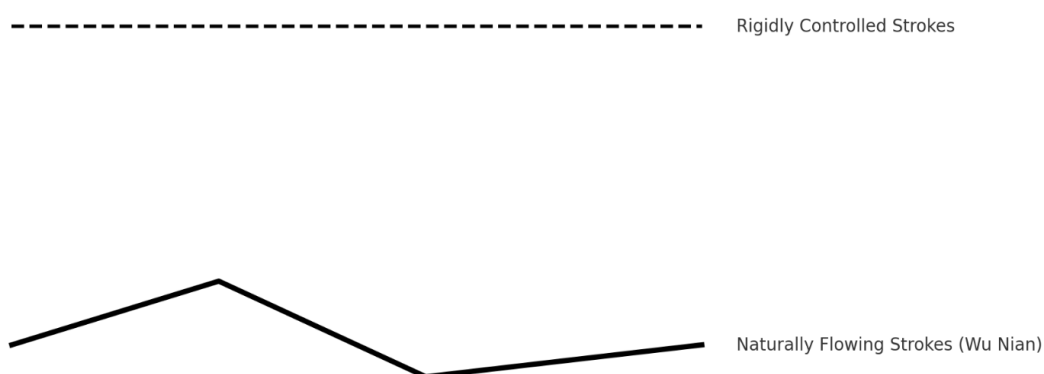
## 4. 5. Justification of Philosophical Model: Logical and Aesthetic Inquiry

Table 5: Logical Model of Intentionality in Zen Calligraphy

Logical Concept	Formal Logical Representation	Interpretation in Calligraphy
Dualistic Perspective	$P \vee \neg P$ (An action is either intentional or spontaneous, but not both)	Western dualistic logic maintains that an action must either be controlled or spontaneous, but cannot be both.
Non-Dualistic Resolution	$\neg(P \vee \neg P) \rightarrow (P \wedge \neg P)$ (Rejecting strict dualism, intention and spontaneity coexist)	Zen philosophy challenges this by rejecting binary thinking, instead allowing the coexistence of structured intent and free-flowing execution.
Zen Artistic Execution	$\exists x (ZenCalligraphy(x) \rightarrow (P(x) \wedge \neg P(x)))$ (A Zen calligraphic act contains both control and freedom simultaneously)	A calligraphic stroke in Zen practice is neither fully controlled nor entirely accidental but embodies both simultaneously.
Paradox of Control vs. Spontaneity	$(\forall x) (P(x) \rightarrow \neg Spontaneity(x)) \wedge (\forall x) (Spontaneity(x) \rightarrow \neg P(x))$ (Western art often separates intention from spontaneity)	Western aesthetics often prioritizes either strict control or free expression, assuming that intention negates spontaneity.
Resolution through Wu Nian	$\exists x (WuNian(x) \rightarrow (P(x) \wedge Spontaneity(x)))$ (Thoughtless awareness integrates intention and spontaneity without self-conscious interference)	Wu Nian (Thoughtless Awareness) dissolves this paradox by allowing actions to emerge naturally, without forced control, yet maintaining artistic precision.

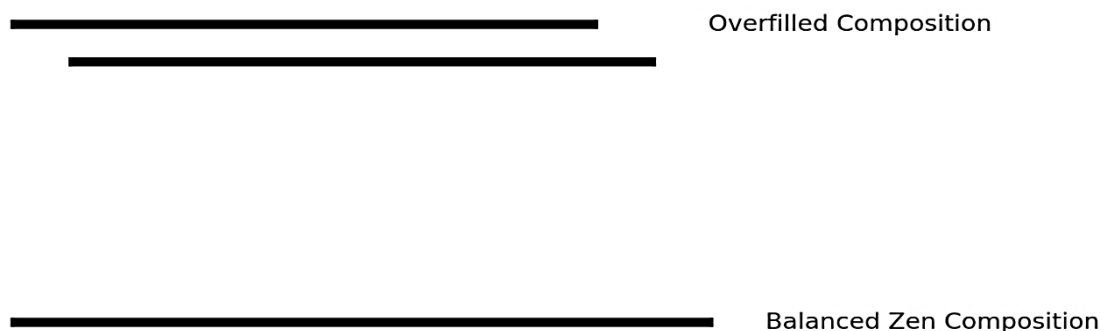
Unlike Western aesthetics and formal logic, Zen philosophy balances spontaneity and control in non-dualistic art (Table 5). Westerners distinguish between intentional and spontaneous actions, so a controlled brushstroke lacks spontaneity and a free-flowing stroke lacks structure. By assuming structured composition and raw emotional expression are mutually exclusive, this binary perspective reinforces the idea that classical realism and abstract expressionism are distinct art forms. In contrast to rigid categorisation, Zen aesthetics combines structured intent and free execution through the non-dualistic formula  $\neg(P \vee \neg P) \rightarrow (P \wedge \neg P)$ . Zen calligraphy combines control and spontaneity, as shown by the logical model  $\exists x (ZenCalligraphy(x) \rightarrow (P(x) \wedge \neg P(x)))$ . Master calligraphers effortlessly blend mind, body, and brushwork, reflecting life's transience. Western aesthetics expresses the paradox of control and spontaneity as

$(\forall x) (P(x) \rightarrow \neg \text{Spontaneity}(x)) \wedge (\forall x) (\text{Spontaneity}(x) \rightarrow \neg P(x))$ , implying controlled actions hinder spontan. Abstract art is spontaneous, while classical realism is structured. Zen aesthetics combines intention and spontaneity through Wu Nian (无念):  $\exists x (\text{WuNian}(x) \rightarrow (P(x) \wedge \text{Spontaneity}(x)))$ . Wu Nian encourages intuitive action, allowing brushstrokes to emerge naturally but precisely, unlike Wu Wei. Sudden and non-attached, Zen calligraphy defies artistic classification. Zen calligraphers use intuition and subtle guidance. Zen calligraphy captures nature's fluidity and the present moment through structure, flow, deliberation, and natural emergence, making it a profound meditative and spiritual practice.



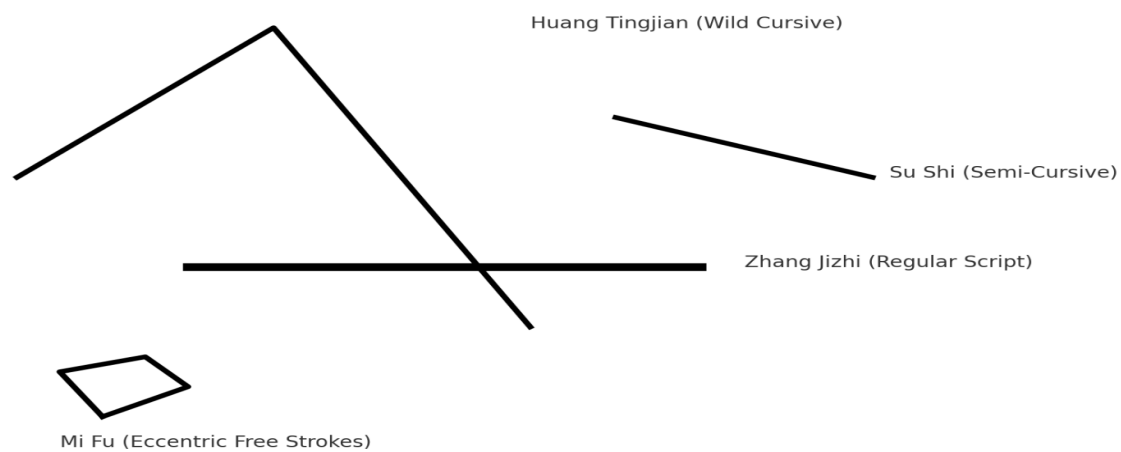
**Figure 5:** Visual Representation of Wu Nian in Calligraphy

Figure 5 contrasts rigidly controlled strokes with naturally flowing strokes to show how effortless action (Wu Nian) shapes Zen calligraphy. Mechanical strokes in the upper figure result from restrictive brushwork, which contradicts Zen aesthetics. Conversely, the lower section has intuitive brushstrokes. This flow embodies Wu Nian, the Zen principle of letting actions happen naturally without effort or precision. The figure shows that Zen calligraphy mastery requires intention and spontaneity to create precise, uncontrived strokes that reflect life's rhythms. Allowing loose control lets calligraphers create expressive, meditative strokes.



**Figure 6:** Calligraphic Representation of Emptiness (Śūnyatā)

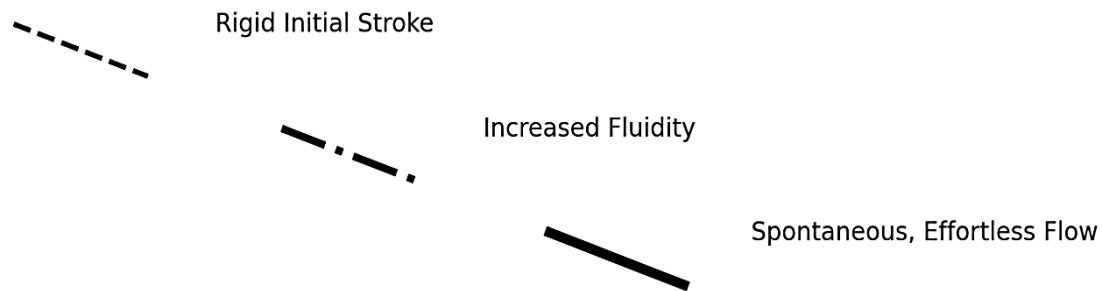
Zen calligraphy emphasizes negative space (Kōng, 空) in composition, as depicted in Figure 6 about Emptiness (Śūnyatā). Zen calligraphy, unlike Western art, emphasizes emptiness alongside ink strokes, aligning with the Buddhist concept of Śūnyatā (emptiness as a fundamental aspect of existence). As shown in the figure, overfilled ink disrupts balance, while Zen-balanced strokes allow the void to breathe and create harmony between presence and absence. Ink and emptiness interact to reflect the Zen belief that meaning comes from both what is written and what is left unsaid, allowing the viewer to engage with the artwork beyond the brushstrokes. The figure shows that Zen calligraphy's true artistic expression comes from a thoughtful balance of form and void, where emptiness enhances movement, depth, and meditation.



**Figure 7:** Calligraphic Styles of Song Dynasty Masters

Figure 7 shows Song Dynasty calligraphers' Zen-inspired brushstrokes. Huang Tingjian's cursive script embodies spontaneity (Ziran, 自然) and the Zen ideal of unrestrained movement and self-expression. His calligraphy expresses his inner state and the transience of time. Poetry and calligraphy blend naturally in Su Shi's semi-cursive script. His style is more like Wu Nian (无念, Thoughtless Awareness) than Wu Wei (无为, Effortless Action), reflecting natural artistic flow without self-conscious control. Zhang Jizhi's script, replacing Zhao Mengfu, conveys Zen's non-duality principle (Bu Er, 不二) with a blend of disciplined brushwork and spontaneity. Zen artistic philosophy complements technical mastery and intuitive flow in his structured yet natural execution. Mi Fu's odd brushstrokes follow Zen principles of imperfection and unpredictability. Zen's spontaneity and natural spontaneity appear in his brushwork (Ziran, 自然). The calligraphers' Zen aesthetics and philosophical engagement show that calligraphy is a meditative practice and visual art. Zen emphasises

mindfulness, spontaneity, and control-freedom, and their brushwork reflects life's fluidity and impermanence.



**Figure 8:** Logical Evolution of a Zen Calligraphic Stroke

Figure 8 shows Logical Evolution of a Zen Calligraphic Stroke depicts the gradual transition from controlled to fluid brushstrokes, embodying Wu Wei (無為, effortless action) in Zen. The figure depicts three stages of a calligraphic stroke: (1) Rigid Initial Stroke, where the brush is controlled with deliberate force, resulting in a constrained and mechanical form that lacks spontaneity; (2) Increased Fluidity, where the artist relinquishes strict control, allowing natural movement while maintaining conscious awareness; and (3) Spontaneous, Effortless Flow, where the brush moves harmoniously without force. This evolution is related to Table 5's Logical Model of Intentionality, where Zen calligraphy reconciles control and spontaneity. The final stage captures the Zen idea that true mastery is surrendering to movement and letting each stroke reflect the artist's meditation. This figure shows that a perfect Zen calligraphic stroke is natural and captures the present and fluidity of life.

## 5. DISCUSSION

Zen aesthetics redefined brushwork, composition, and creative intentionality, making Song Dynasty calligraphy a meditation on impermanence, thoughtlessness, and spontaneity. The Zen-inspired method balances controlled execution and intuitive flow to create a dynamic movement-stillness pattern that reflects life's transience. Calligraphy's contrast between rigid control and natural motion shows how art transcends technique and becomes an extension of mindfulness, where strokes emerge instinctively. Zen thought encourages artists to let brushwork develop intuitively and without conscious interference, fostering fluidity and discipline. Zen emphasises imperfection, unpredictability, and natural rhythm, believing that true artistic mastery comes from living in the moment rather than mechanical precision.

Western aesthetics emphasise structure, proportion, and composition. Calligraphy's shift from effortless action to thoughtless awareness shows that artistic expression is about a deep, unselfconscious engagement with the creative process, where the artist gives up control and immerses in creation. Zen aesthetics view discipline as a meditative state where mind, hand, and brush reflect artist consciousness and skill. Calligraphy can embody non-duality, where structured execution and intuitive motion are seamlessly interwoven, by turning restraint and unstructured flow into artistic integrity (Bogdanova-Kummer, 2025). Song Dynasty calligraphers' stylistic differences demonstrate that Zen aesthetics foster a deep artist-brush relationship where each stroke's dynamic energy reflects life's fluidity. Technical mastery allows creative freedom, as some masters used bold, unrestrained strokes to reflect thought and movement, while others used poetic rhythm and mindful execution to capture impermanence and meditative awareness. Some calligraphers used a refined, uncontrived approach that emphasised structure and let natural movement shape the composition, showing that form and formlessness are interdependent in creativity. Some Zen aesthetics styles actively rejected formalism and embraced irregularity, unpredictability, and irregularity, valuing individuality and natural expression over strict artistic formulas. These variations demonstrate that calligraphy is dynamic and that artists interpret Zen's fundamental principles differently (Zhang, 2024). Beyond style, calligraphy is about ink and empty space, where presence and absence define art. Zen philosophy views negative space as a meaning-maker, proving silence is as important as speech. Spatial brushwork emphasises the interconnectedness of all elements rather than strokes, giving compositions breathing room. Artists create openness and fluidity by leaving spaces unfilled, reinforcing the idea that true artistry is balancing through intentional omission and that absence is as expressive as presence. This approach redefines artistic meaning by challenging Western structured methods that value filled space over unmarked surface (Shen et al., 2024). Zen aesthetics rejects dualism and accepts structure and fluidity to balance control and spontaneity. Zen calligraphy blurs precision and unrestrained motion, making it a pure engagement in which the artist is mindfully aware but neither imposing nor relinquishing control. Since true artistic mastery requires both intentional and spontaneous elements, Zen philosophy rejects formal artistic logic and produces works with technical refinement and intuitive spontaneity. Thus, understanding that discipline does not limit creativity but provides the foundation for natural movement resolves the control versus free expression paradox and proves that writing is a deeply meditative process where every brushstroke imprints presence and

awareness (Smrz, 2024). Calligraphy becomes fluid, emphasising movement and rejecting art's permanence. Calligraphy emphasises movement over static perfection, reflecting the idea that existence is in constant flux and each stroke represents a unique and unrepeatable moment in time, unlike traditions that emphasise replication and formal precision. This approach's philosophical foundations show that calligraphy is a self-cultivation practice where meditation and artistic execution are inseparable, reinforcing the idea that mastery is about creativity rather than perfection. Zen theory states that true refinement comes from an intuitive connection with the act, allowing the hand to move freely while maintaining a deep awareness, resulting in harmonious brushwork. The balance between inked strokes and open space in Zen calligraphy emphasises that form and formlessness are equally important in creating a cohesive whole, unlike Western traditions, which value tangible presence over emptiness. Zen art uses absence to show that omission is as powerful as inclusion. Other cultures express art with filled compositions. This philosophy applies beyond calligraphy to other artistic discussions, showing that creativity is the ability to embrace spontaneity while maintaining deep intentionality, reinforcing the idea that artistic mastery is about balance rather than control. This study uses historical, philosophical, and aesthetic analysis to demonstrate that Song Dynasty calligraphy promotes mindfulness, impermanence, and intuition. Calligraphy's dynamic brush movement captures the essence of existence, deepening self-awareness rather than skill. This redefines artistic agency by showing that creativity is a fluid engagement with the present, reinforcing the idea that true artistry embraces transience. Zen calligraphy reflects life because it blurs control and spontaneity, letting movement guide artistic intention (Wang, 2023).

## 6. CONCLUSION

Wu Nian (无念) describes Song Dynasty calligraphy as a Zen practice that emphasizes spontaneity, impermanence, non-duality, emptiness, and thoughtlessness. Song Dynasty calligraphers prioritized process and flow over structure and composition through meditation and existential awareness. Zen calligraphy fostered creativity. Zen non-duality reconciles control and spontaneity and shows that true artistic expression requires fluidly integrating opposing forces. Zen calligraphy emphasizes the connection between negative space and ink strokes through emptiness (Sūnyatā, 空). Not only forms, but composition gives meaning.



Calligraphy's philosophical connection to impermanence, mindfulness, and Zen existence challenges traditional art. This study shows how Song calligraphers turned brushwork into a meditative act, filling gaps in scholarly understanding by showing that Zen calligraphy blurs art and spirituality and offers an alternative perspective on artistic intentionality to Western traditions that emphasize representation and control. The study found that true Zen calligraphy mastery requires an intuitive alignment between the artist, the brush, and the present moment, supporting the idea that art is created through presence and awareness rather than deliberate manipulation. These discoveries link artistic execution and Zen philosophy, deepening our understanding of creativity as existential inquiry and shaping contemporary discussions on art, self-expression, and creativity. Song Dynasty calligraphy captures Zen thought's transient, spontaneous, and intuitive nature, proving its historical, cultural, philosophical, and artistic value. Zen Buddhist historical, philosophical, and aesthetic perspectives on Song Dynasty calligraphy are valuable, but primary historical sources are scarce, artistic interpretation is subjective, and textual analysis alone cannot reconstruct ancient calligraphers' contemplative and existential states. Because brushwork is transient and Zen art is introspective, Song Dynasty calligraphy is hard to explain as meditative. This gap could be filled by studying how contemporary Zen calligraphers use embodied practice and performance-based methods to relate brushstroke techniques to meditative awareness and self-cultivation. Zen calligraphy has been contrasted with Western aesthetic traditions, but non-dualistic Eastern artistic traditions like Japanese Zen calligraphy, Indian philosophical aesthetics, and Daoist ink-wash painting may show how different spiritual traditions integrate art, philosophy, and metaphysics. Future research could examine how Zen calligraphic principles affect digital art, generative design, and AI to understand how spontaneity, intentionality, and the delicate balance between control and freedom shape modern art. How Zen aesthetics inform emerging technologies would contribute to discussions on artistic agency, human creativity, and the changing relationship between technology and aesthetic experience, keeping Zen thought relevant in contemporary art and innovation philosophy.

## 7. RESEARCH APPLICATION

Song Dynasty calligraphy embodies Zen Buddhist principles of spontaneity, impermanence, non-duality, and mindfulness, illuminating art theory, philosophy, and creative practice. Zen aesthetics in artistic

intentionality reframes calligraphy as a meditative process that values presence and fluid engagement over structure, challenging Western authorship, representational accuracy, and controlled composition. Using Zen concepts like Wu Nian (Thoughtless Awareness, 无念) and Śūnyatā (Emptiness, 空) to balance discipline and spontaneity in art highlights the non-dualistic nature of creativity in Zen philosophy. Artistic expression and philosophical inquiry are seamlessly linked. Traditional calligraphy, flow, intuition, and the balance between presence and absence influence contemporary art, digital media, and design methodologies, giving artists, calligraphers, and designers a conceptual framework for incorporating Zen aesthetics into modern creative processes. Zen calligraphy principles can be used in creative workshops, meditative exercises, and cognitive well-being programs to promote presence, non-attachment, and intuitive artistic invention for self-expression and inner equilibrium in mindfulness-based artistic education and therapy. Zen traditions measure artistic mastery by aligning with natural rhythm, providing valuable perspectives on contemporary debates about creativity, artistic agency, and tradition in evolving artistic landscapes. This research uses Zen philosophy and artistic innovation to examine how historical insights can influence modern creative thought, reinforcing the idea that art is about embodying existence through mindful and intentional creative engagement.

#### References

- Baihua, Z. (2023). *An Aesthetics Anthology*. Routledge.
- Bogdanova-Kummer, E. (2025). Zen Violence: The Legacy of Nantenbō Tōjū's Calligraphy in the Postwar Avant-Garde. *The Journal of Japanese Studies*, 51(1), 1-40.
- Chen, S., & Dewancker, B. J. (2024). The influence of Zen Buddhism and ink wash painting on Japanese gardens during the medieval Japan. *Journal of Asian Architecture and Building Engineering*, 1-13.
- Dahlkemper, R. Y. L. (2023). *Yin Virtues for Modern Psyche: Exploring the Unique Insights From the Chinese Self-cultivation Tradition*. California Institute of Integral Studies.
- Deng, H. (2020). Research on Su Shi's Calligraphy Aesthetics. *Frontiers in Art Research*, 2(9).
- Du, X. (2021). *On A Snowy Night: Yishan Yining (1247-1317) and the Development of Zen Calligraphy in Medieval Japan*. Columbia University.
- Guan, Y. (2024). Aesthetic conceptions and cultural symbols in traditional Chinese painting. *Trans/Form/Ação*, 47, e0240066.
- Huang, J. (2022). An overview of Chinese aesthetics and aesthetic education. *Authentic Chinese educational thought*, 135-150.
- Jeffrey, D. M. (2024). *Nurturing a Daoist-Inspired Classroom Pedagogy through the Contemplative Lenses of Teacher Diaries*. IAP.

- Jia, F. (2024). Zen in Early Persian Painting—A Study of the 1314–1315 Jāmi‘ al-Tavārikh Illustrations. *Religions*, 15(1), 75.
- Jiwu, Z. (2023). The Visual Representation of Contemporary Avant-Garde Art. In *Visual Culture in Contemporary China I* (pp. 69-108). Routledge.
- Li, D. H. (2025). Qi Cultivation in Daoist Arts. *Journal of Daoist Studies*, 18(18), 210-225.
- Li, S. (2022). Sinograph, Calligraphy, and Novelistic Aesthetics. In *Travel, Translation and Transmedia Aesthetics: Franco-Chinese Literature and Visual Arts in a Global Age* (pp. 115-168). Springer.
- Min, J. (2022). Aesthetics in Korea: Traditions and Perspectives. *ESPEs*, 11(1), 7-17.
- Pang, X. (2023). Calligraphic techniques in painting: The aesthetic expression and literary significance of “writing” in Ni Zan’s paintings.
- Poškaitė, L. (2020). Everyday aesthetics in the dialogue of Chinese and Western aesthetic sensibilities. *Dialogue and Universalism*(3), 225-244.
- Qi, Z. (2023). The influence of art philosophy on Chinese classical garden landscape design. *International Journal of Education and Humanities*, 11(2), 241-244.
- Sernelj, T. (2021). Confucian and Daoist aesthetics. *Synthesis philosophica*, 36(2), 251-256.
- Shen, J.-S., Xiao, Y.-M., & Lin, C.-L. (2024). Exploring the Characteristics of Zen Painting. *Creative Education*, 15(4), 652-677.
- Smrz, M. R. (2024). *The Enso Framework: A Zen Approach to Addressing Landscape Scars* [University of Georgia].
- Song, Z., Jiang, H., & Cui, T. (2025). Exploring the correlation of space creation in Suzhou classical gardens and the Chinese calligraphy Yan Zhenqing’s three manuscripts. *Journal of Asian Architecture and Building Engineering*, 24(4), 2155-2177.
- Tanahashi, K., & O’Leary, S. (2022). *Delight in One Thousand Characters: The Classic Manual of East Asian Calligraphy*. Shambhala Publications.
- Wang, W. (2023). Popular Chinese Fonts: The Role of Minimalism, the Influence of Zen and the Bauhaus School. *Contemporary buddhism*, 24(1/2), 110-133.
- Wang, Y. (2024). Standards and Norms for Calligraphy and Painting: Fenggu in Calligraphy. In *Aesthetics from Ancient China: Aspects of Fenggu* (pp. 17-54). Springer.
- Wu, X. (2020). *Geometry and Architectural Representation in Premodern China* [University of Florida].
- Xing, X. (2023). Analysis of “Taste”: Serves as the Aesthetic Experience of Calligraphy. 2023 5th International Conference on Literature, Art and Human Development (ICLAHD 2023),
- YI, Y. (2023). An Analysis of the Status of Japanese Zen Art Aesthetics in Ukiyo-e from Katsushika Hokusai to Van Gogh. *American Journal of Art and Design*, 8(1), 12-17.
- Zhang, M. (2024). Comment on “The relationship between Tang-Song poetry and zen buddhism thought”. *Trans/Form/Ação*, 47(4), e02400231.