

*The Heart Dharma and Martial Arts of Five Hundred Arhats From an Analysis of
Grand Master Hunyuan Chanshi's Calligraphy Paintings*

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Abstract

In the Arhat Belief that has prevailed since the Tang and Song Dynasties in China, people pray to the Arhats for peace, personal safety and health. Individuals are also able to achieve spiritual lift, good health and longevity through self-cultivation of mind and self-practice of the body. In martial arts, there is also a practice way of cultivating the mind and comprehending the rules of nature and the human body simultaneously, so as to achieve the harmony between the small universe of the human body and the external universe. On the other hand, religious art can convey the practitioner's perception and practice process with visible images. This study attempts to explore the enlightenment and morphology of Arhats' practice expressed in the images of the Venerable Arhats of a new religion in Taiwan. This article is based on the 500 calligraphy paintings of Arhats with the dragon-shaped font as research objects, which painted by Grand Master Hunyuan Chanshi who communed with the sacred during period of "Ritual of Praying for Safety in the Year of Renyin (2023)". By researching the literature and comparing the relationship between the calligraphy of Hunyuan Chanshi and the trend of mountains ranges where the Arhats practiced, this study found that the topography of these mountains, from the perspectives of I Ching and Feng Shui, show the heart dharma of the Arhats and the martial art practiced by the Arhats. Findings of this study intend to provide inspirations of wisdom, health and longevity for readers.

Keywords: Five Hundred Arhats' Calligraphy, I Ching, Feng Shui, Heart Dharma, Health-Preserving Fist Techniques, Practice

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Introduction

Stated in Buddhist scriptures or ancient books, the Five Hundred Arhats live and practice cultivation in Kunlun Mountain or other high mountains (Figure 1). These statements are in the “Buddha Spoke the Xingqi Xing Jing” (Scroll 1, Translator: Kang Meng Xiang) and in the “Buddhist Records of The Western World” (Scroll 9, Magādhā, Translator: Xuan Zang).

“The so-called Kunlun Mountain is the center of Jambu-dīpa. The mountains are full of precious stones, and there are five hundred caves in the surrounding areas. The caves are all filled with gold, and five hundred Arhats often live in them. There is a big spring Anotatta, surrounded by mountains outside and flat ground inside the mountains, with the spring in it” (Buddha Spoke the Xingqi Xing Jing, Scroll 1; Translator: Kang Meng Xiang).

“Travel northeast for more than a hundred miles from Kukkutapāda-giri Mountain to Buddha-vana Mountain. The peaks and cliffs are lofty, the crags are hidden, and there are stone chambers among the rocks, where the Buddha once came and stopped.... Five hundred Arhats practiced here, and they were encountered or sighted”(Buddhist Records of The Western World, Scroll 9, Magādhā; Translator: Xuan Zang).



Figure 1: Xia, J.S, (n.d.). Arhat in Lingjinyun Mountain [Painting].

Retrieved from <https://xjsarts.com/project/%E7%BE%85%E6%BC%A2-15/>

Bodhidharma, the founder of Zen Buddhism, taught the resident clergy in Shao-lin Temple exercises and self-defense. These evolved into the famous Shao-lin style of martial arts (Keown, 2004). The practice of this martial art not only strengthens the body, but also helps with spiritual practice (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Matthews, J. (2019, May 2) *The Legend behind the Founder of Shaolin Kung Fu* [Painting].

Retrieved from <https://taekwondotimes.com/news/2019/05/the-legend-behind-the-founder-of-shaolin-kung-fu/>

Main Object of Worship in Arhat Belief

Scholar Liu's (Liu, 2015) study shows that Arhat Belief began to develop in the late Tang Dynasty (618-907 A.D.) in China, and flourished in the Song Dynasty (960- 1279 A.D.) after going through the Five Dynasties (907-960 A.D.). Also, Li's (2009) research shows that the main object of worship in Arhat Belief is the carved or painted Arhat, not the relevant scriptures. Further, since the Five Hundred Arhats Hall was built by Qian Liu, King of Wuyue, during the Five Dynasties period, the Five Hundred Arhats formed a new belief system. The popularity of Arhat Belief is not only worshiped by emperors from the Five Dynasties to the Song Dynasty, but also related to the widespread circulation of various legends of Arhat miracles and the works of literati and portraits of painters (Liu, 2015).

In Buddhism, Arhat is the highest stage of realization achieved by the practice of holy monks, and holy monks are saints who protect the Buddha's Dharma and live in the world to provide services after the Buddha's nirvana (Liu, 2015). In particular, Arhat has escaped life and death and will no longer be reborn. Therefore, in the Song Dynasty when Arhat Belief flourished, people often made "Arhat offerings" on birthdays or made Arhat statues to pray for longer life (Liu, 2015).

Therefore, in the Arhat Belief, there is a wide range of things prayed to Arhat. Especially since the Five Dynasties, the combination of Arhat Belief and local beliefs made the connotations of the Arhat Belief more diverse. The Things to pray to Arhat include: personal safety and health, good weather for the country, calming down of foreign troubles, and peace in the world.

In the contemporary Buddhist offering photos (Figure 3) and Chinese Song Dynasty Arhat offering paintings (Figure 4), it can be observed that great similarities exist in scenes, rituals, and the details of setting offerings.



Figure 3: Zhang, Z.C. (2017, April 19). Monks gives Offerings.
Life News Agency [Photograph].
Retrieved from <http://www.lnanews.com/news/102016>



Figure 4: Liu, S.F. (2015). The Arhat Cult an Rituals during the Song Dynasty:
With an Analysis of the “Five Hundred Arhats Paintings” at Kyoto’s Daitokuji.
Bulletin of Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, 86 (4), 752.
Retrieved from <https://www2.ihp.sinica.edu.tw/file/2832uXEKsUh.pdf>

Arhat Belief Embodies the Integration of Cultures

The Arhat Belief was developed from the faith of holy monks and also combined with the local beliefs. As Joachim Wach, Gerardus van der Leeuw, Mircea Eliade, and Peter L. Berger respectively expressed, religion is always in dynamic development and in integrating (syncretism) with more diverse connotations to continue and to expand. This not only enriches the connotation of religion, but also has social functions. It is also a crucial factor in the process of human survival and growth, and also a common cultural phenomenon.

As the data of global religious diversity shown by Pew Research Center, Taiwan's society is a religiously pluralistic society (Figure 5). Therefore, the authors have the opportunity to observe this cultural phenomenon of Arhat Belief in Taiwan.

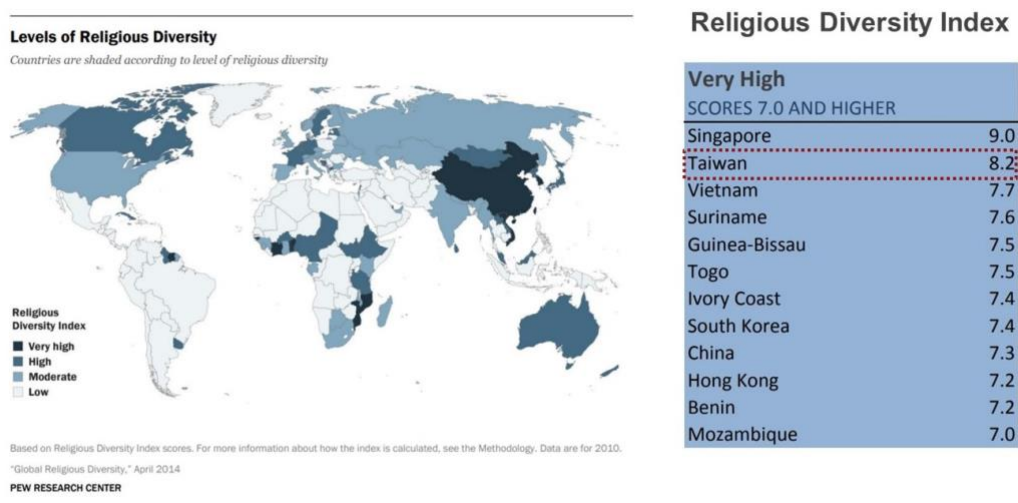


Figure 5: Pew Research Center. (2014, April 4). *Global Religious Diversity: Half of the Most Religiously Diverse Countries are in Asia-Pacific Region*, 6,15.
Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2014/04/Religious-Diversity-full-report.pdf>

Contemporary Calligraphy Art of Five Hundred Arhats

Taiwan's news religion Weixin Shengjiao held the “Ritual of Praying for Safety in the Year of Renyin (2023)”. During this ceremony, its founder, Grand Master Hunyuan Chanshi communed with the sacred and created 500 calligraphy paintings of Arhats with the dragon-shaped font. Each painting represents an image of an Arhat’s practice of the body, martial arts, and the mind (Figure 6).



Figure 6: Chang, C.M. & Hung Y.C (Producer). (2023). The special episode of the calligraphy paintings of “Five Hundred Arhats blessing Taiwan” (4).
Weixin Arts Avenue (86) [Video]. Taichung, Taiwan. WXTV.
Retrieved from https://wxtv.com.tw/public/web/web0201/video_list/12532

Different from the more realistic methods used by painters of the Song Dynasty to create Arhat religious art (Figure 4), Grand Master Hunyuan Chanshi's "Five Hundred Arhats Calligraphy Paintings" (Figure 6) present an innovative style of abstract visual art. This difference prompted the authors to explore the Chinese cultural context and the meanings behind the Five Hundred Arhats Calligraphy Paintings.

Methodology

This study attempts to explore the topography of these mountains from the perspective of the I Ching and Feng Shui through the literature discussion and the comparison of the relationship between Grand Master Hunyuan Chanshi's "Five Hundred Arhats Calligraphy Paintings" with the direction of the mountains where Arhats practice. From these perspectives, the morphology of the topography presents the spiritual practice of the Arhats and the fist techniques, which are the Arhats' enlightenment and perception of mountain trends and landscape shapes.

The authors analyzed the brushstroke trajectories of the calligraphy and found elements of forward rotation, counter rotation, 360-degree directional changes in space, a sense of void and solid, as well as a sense of endless change (Figure 7, Figure 8). These are major elements in I Ching Feng Shui Theory and in Marital Arts (Figure 9).

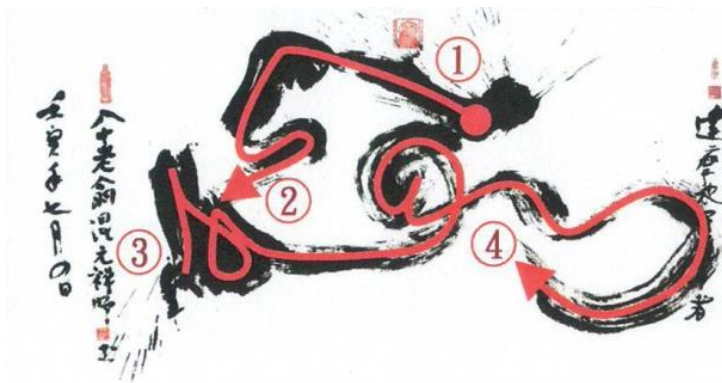


Figure 7: Chang, C.M. & Hung Y.C (Producer). (2023). The special episode of the calligraphy paintings of "Five Hundred Arhats blessing Taiwan" (4). *Weixin Arts Avenue (86)* [Video]. Taichung, Taiwan. WXTV. Retrieved from https://wxtv.com.tw/public/web/web0201/video_list/12532



Figure 8: Chang, C.M. & Hung Y.C (Producer). (2023). The special episode of the calligraphy paintings of "Five Hundred Arhats blessing Taiwan" (8). *Weixin Arts Avenue (90)* [video]. Taichung, Taiwan. WXTV. Retrieved from https://wxtv.com.tw/public/web/web0201/video_list/12536

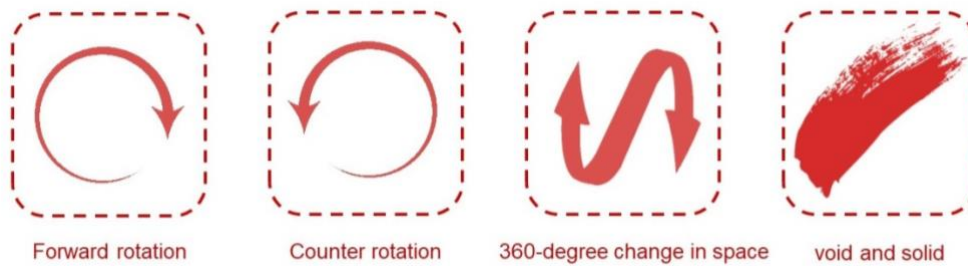


Figure 9: Analysis diagram of the brushstroke trajectories of Calligraphy Paintings

Yin-Yang Theory

In Chinese Culture, the Ying and Yang Theory is a major concept. It reveals the view of the world has two sides: Ying and Yang (negative and positive), day and night, void and solid, and stillness and movement. These show the flow of Qi, the subtle movement of energy in the Universe. Yang is positive such as a vapor, rising up like heaven. Ying is negative such as condensation, going down like earth (Chen, 2009). Yang's left rotation (counter rotation) and Yin's right rotation (forward rotation) constitute the cycle of the rise and fall of Qi. This is the phenomenon of generation, transformation, and operation of Qi (Figure 10).

As Mou, Zong-San expressed: One thing is Tai-Chi or Tai-Xu, the divine body is round, and the two bodies are day and night, yin (negative) and yang (positive), void and solid, movement and stillness, etc., which belong to Qi (Chen, 2009). Also, as Ge mentioned, the concept of "Yin and Yang" in ancient China runs through everything in nature, society, and people. This is the so-called "things are born in two, and the two are matched" (Ge, 2007).

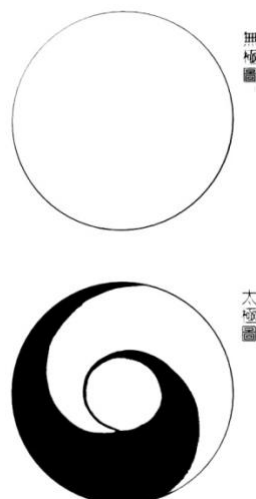


Figure 10: Retrieved from Chen, S. (2016).
The Illustrated Canon of Chen Style Taijiquan (pp.45).
 Taipei, Taiwan: Dan-Jann Publishing Co., Ltd.

Heaven, Earth, and Man Theory

In addition, as Ge (2007) stated, in ancient China, there was the so-called theory of the three talents, which is called "heaven, earth, and man" (Figure 11). There are some very subtle correspondences and echoes among these three. There is wind in the sky and water in the ground, and people also have meridians, subtle channels of energy, and blood flow. It is said

that the earth, like humans, has “veins” through which vitality flows. These veins are called the "Dragon Veins” of the earth (Ge, 2007), (Figure 12).



Figure 11: Retrieved from Chen, S. (2016).
The Illustrated Canon of Chen Style Taijiquan (pp.82).
 Taipei, Taiwan: Dan-Jann Publishing Co., Ltd.

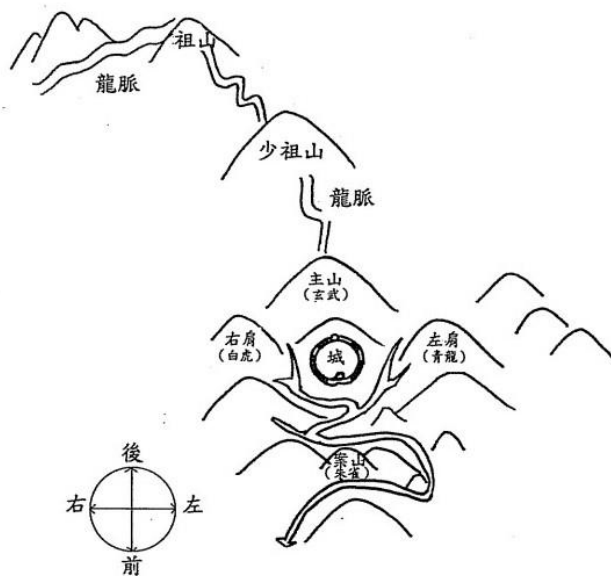


Figure 12: Retrieved from Ge, Z.G. (2007).*Imagine the Earth: From Feng Shui to Yin Yang and Five Elements. Religious Beliefs and Imagination, Lecture Series of Chinese Civilisation Centre* (pp. 41), City University of Hong Kong Press

Dragon Vein Concept

Furthermore, Wang Zhu (997-1057 A.D.) of the Northern Song Dynasty and others were ordered by the emperor to compile the third volume of the " Dili Xinshu (New Book of Geography)" and included the official book " Gāngyuán jíxiōng tújiě (Good and Bad Hills and Plains Illustrations)", which imagined the peaks as manifestations of various dragon shapes (Yang, 2019, 149-150), (Figure 13).



Figure 13: Retrieved from Yang, Y.C. (2019). *The Dragon's Veins. Newsletter of the Institute of Chinese Literature and Philosophy, Academia Sinica, 29 (1), 149-150*

Martial Arts Theory

The fist techniques are generally divided into external and internal styles. Lee (2001) stated that all fist techniques are similar in terms of internal and external considerations. Generally, these techniques fall inside the scope of Ying and Yang, void and solid, hardness and softness. Lee (2001) also stated that internal-style martial arts begin with the self-training of the practitioners. These martial arts styles build on people's observation and sight of nature. In addition, people can gradually discover their own potential through contemplation and illumination of the mind. Thereafter, people are able to develop rules to build up one's body and to strengthen one's mind (Lee, 2001). Therefore, People practice to achieve harmony between the small universe of the human body and the external universe.

Heart Dharma and Martial Arts

In I Ching Feng Shui theory, the cycle of time and space is actually the intersection and movement of the Bagua directions, time, and geographical environment. In addition to the Bagua directions of mountains, rivers, and the earth, according to I Ching Feng Shui, the main parts of the human body also correspond to the Bagua directions of Feng Shui (Figure 14).

Moreover, in the field of oriental martial arts and regimen, the practice and meanings of martial arts also have artistic conception that is consistent with the principles of I Ching. This echoes the cultural connotations of harmony of Yin and Yang, back to nature, and endless life. It also echoes with the martial arts practices of Bodhidharma to strengthen the body and help with spiritual practice.



Figure 14: Retrieved from Chen, C.J. (2014). *Illustration of the Yellow Emperor's Internal Classics*. (pp.cover) Taiwan: Xin wen chuang wen hua shi ye you xian gong si

Research Findings

From the above “Dragon Vein”, “Yin and Yang”, and “Heaven, Earth, and Man” concepts behind the cultural ideology, it can be comprehended that there are relations between the forms of the "Five Hundred Arhats Calligraphy Paintings" and the direction of the mountains.

It was also observed that Grand Master Hunyuan Chanshi has the following oral statement: "The places where the Five Hundred Arhats practice are on the mountains on the earth....They practice martial arts on the top of the mountains to strengthen their bodies" (Chang & Hung, 2023). This statement strongly relates to the cultural context of Feng Shui and prompts the authors to delve deeper into its connotations. This study focuses on a few paintings with a relatively small geographical scope.

Among the 500 calligraphy paintings of Arhats, 74 calligraphy paintings were mentioned by Grand Master Hanyuan Chanshi that Arhats lived and practiced in a specific smaller mountainous area. Currently, from these 74 pieces of calligraphy paintings, the authors found that the brushstroke trajectories of 9 calligraphy paintings have significant similarities with the actual trends of the mountain ranges (Figure 15).

Category	The number of "Five Hundred Arhats Calligraphy Paintings" published publicly	The number of calligraphy paintings with smaller area where Arhats practiced (as Grand Master Hunyuan Chanshi orally described)	This study compares the trends of the mountains in the places where Arhats practiced with the brushstroke trajectories of "Five Hundred Arhats Calligraphy Paintings"
Number	175	74	9

Figure 15: Table of current quantity obtained from calligraphy comparison

Comparison of Each Calligraphy Painting With the Relative Mountain Trend

From the analysis and comparison of the calligraphy of Patajadeva Arhat, whom Grand Master Hanyuan Chanshi mentioned practices on Mount Everest, with the mountain range aerial photo, it found that the direction of the mountain highly coincides with the brushstroke trajectory (Figure 16).

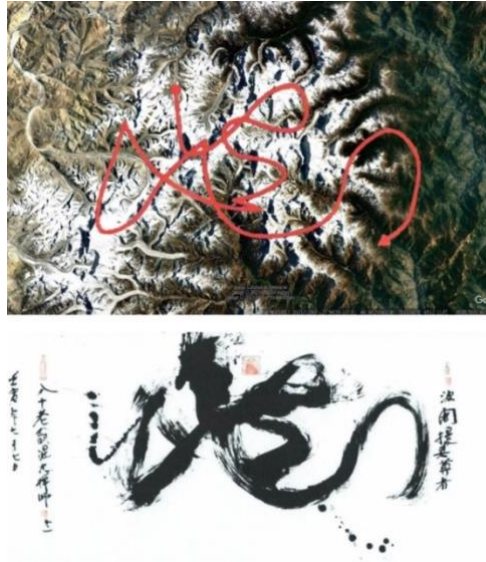


Figure 16: Patajadeva Arhat

Top: Google. (n.d.). [Google Earth Pro, Mount Everest].

Retrieved from <https://www.google.com/earth/>

Bottom: Chang, C.M. & Hung Y.C (Producer). (2023). The special episode of the calligraphy paintings of "Five Hundred Arhats blessing Taiwan" (7).

Weixin Arts Avenue (89) [Video]. Taichung, Taiwan. WXTV.

Retrieved from https://wxtv.com.tw/public/web/web0201/video_list/12535

As for the calligraphy showing the dragon vein of Mount Alps where Puṇyayaśa Arhat practices, it demonstrates the concept of "Forward Rotation" and "Counter Rotation" in the Ying-Yang Theory (Figure 17).



Figure 17: Punyayaśa Arhat

Top: Google. (n.d.). [Google Earth Pro, Mount Alps].

Retrieved from <https://www.google.com/earth/>

Bottom: Chang, C.M. & Hung Y.C (Producer). (2023). The special episode of the calligraphy paintings of “Five Hundred Arhats blessing Taiwan” (8).

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The calligraphy represents the dragon vein of Taihang mountain ranges in China, where Fuchénsanmei Arhat practices, and shows the flow of energy and Qi in the dragon veins of the mountain (Figure 18).



Figure 18: Fuchénsanmei Arhat

Top: Google. (n.d.). [Google Earth Pro, Taihang Shanmai, Wu'an City, Handan City, China].

Retrieved from <https://www.google.com/earth/>

Bottom: Chang, C.M. & Hung Y.C (Producer). (2023). The special episode of the calligraphy paintings of “Five Hundred Arhats blessing Taiwan” (14).

Weixin Arts Avenue (102) [Video]. Taichung, Taiwan. WXTV.

Retrieved from https://wxtv.com.tw/public/web/web0201/video_list/12851

In addition, the calligraphy expresses the dragon vein of Dagang Mountain ranges in Taiwan, where Leide Arhat practices, and reflects the 360-degree directional changes in space (Figure 19).

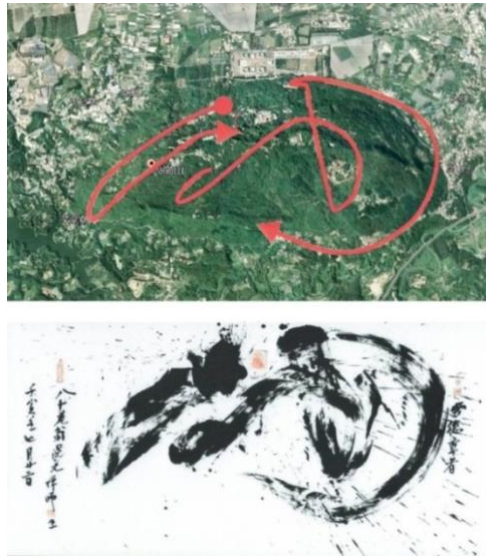


Figure 19: Leide Arhat

Top: Google. (n.d.).[Google Earth Pro, Dagang Mountain, Tianliao District, Kaohsiung]. Retrieved from <https://www.google.com/earth/>

Bottom: Chang, C.M. & Hung Y.C (Producer). (2023). The special episode of the calligraphy paintings of “Five Hundred Arhats blessing Taiwan” (16).

Weixin Arts Avenue (106) [Video]. Taichung, Taiwan. WXTV.

Retrieved from https://wxtv.com.tw/public/web/web0201/video_list/12855

The calligraphy shows the dragon vein of Mount Kuno in Japan, where Zhijī Arhat practices, and reveals the sense of endless life of I Ching (Figure 20).



Figure 20: Zhijī Arhat

Top: Google. (n.d.). [Google Earth Pro, Mount Kuno].

Retrieved from <https://www.google.com/earth/>

Bottom: Chang, C.M. & Hung Y.C (Producer). (2023).

The special episode of the calligraphy paintings of “Five Hundred Arhats blessing Taiwan” (20). *Weixin Arts Avenue (111)* [Video]. Taichung, Taiwan. WXTV.

Retrieved from https://wxtv.com.tw/public/web/web0201/video_list/12860

The Comparison of Five Hundred Arhats Calligraphy Art and Fist Movement of Martial Arts

Our study found that Grand Master Hunyuan Chanshi's Five Hundred Arhats calligraphy's brushstroke trajectories (Figure 7 & Figure 8) have high similarities to fist movement of martial arts (Figure 21).

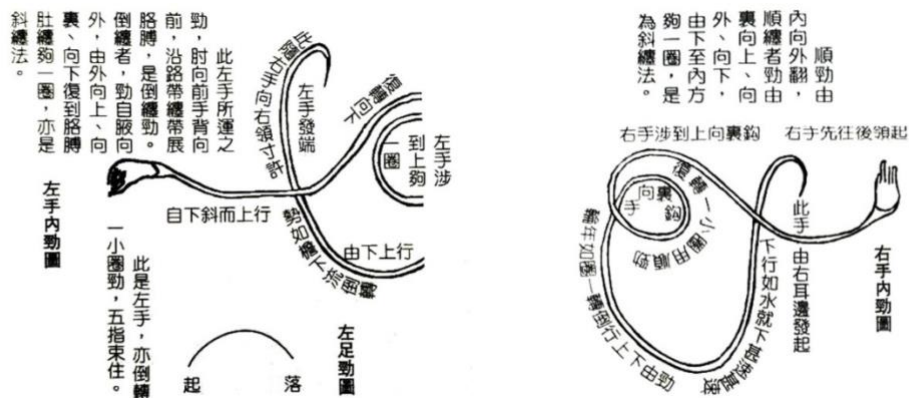


Figure 21: Retrieved from Chen, S. (2016). *The Illustrated Canon of Chen Style Taijiquan* (pp.234). Taipei, Taiwan: Dan-Jann Publishing Co., Ltd.

Through the comparisons, the authors discovered the characteristics of "Five Hundred Arhats Calligraphy Paintings" such as: forward rotation and counter rotation of Yin and Yang, void and solid concepts in the brushstroke trajectories, hardness and softness in the wielding of the pen, and the flow of energy. These attributes embody the key elements of martial arts. In addition, the concepts such as "void and solid ", "far and near", "up and down", "three-dimensional space", and "360-degree directional changes and norms" constituted by the "Five

Hundred Arhats Calligraphy Paintings" are exactly the spatial structures presented in martial arts performances (Figure 22).



Figure 22: @user-ql6lx2ro5m. (Producer). (2021, November 15).
Animated dynamic ink Chinese style martial arts spirit [Video].
Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HfEBDc2UANK>

The ultimate commonalities shown in the "Five Hundred Arhats Calligraphy Paintings" and the martial arts are the beauty of dynamic balance and coordination. Moreover, martial arts build on people's observation and sight of nature, and people in harmony with nature. These also coincide with the Feng Shui principles contained in the "Five Hundred Arhats Calligraphy Paintings".

Conclusion

From the above analysis and exploration, it can be found that Grand Master Hunyuan Chanshi's "Five Hundred Arhats Calligraphy Paintings" demonstrate the birth, transformation, and operation of "Qi". The forms of these paintings have the commonalities of "arc movement and rotation". It can sum up that these paintings are combinations of various "forward rotation" and "counter rotation". These characteristics echo the concept of Yin-Yang and the elements of martial arts.

The unique dragon-shaped font of "Five Hundred Arhats Calligraphy Paintings" cleverly reflects the concept that the earth has "dragon veins," which have vitality flowing through it. This leads to the idea that the calligraphy paintings contain the Zen meanings of the Yin-Yang, I Ching, and Feng Shui theories.

From the views of "achieving the harmony between the small universe of the human body and the external universe", "harmony of Yin and Yang", "back to nature", and "endless life" in Chinese culture, the "Five Hundred Arhats Calligraphy Paintings" convey cultural connotations of I Ching and Feng Shui, and it also reflects the significant elements of martial arts. This study aims to provide a framework for comprehending the Five Hundred Arhats' heart dharma and martial arts from the Chinese cultural connotations, especially from the perspectives of I Ching and Feng Shui.

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