

# The “Emulative” Portraits: Lang Jingshan’s Photography of Zhang Daqian

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Lang Jingshan (1892–1995) was an important artist in the history of Chinese photography. [1],[#N1] He started his career in Shanghai in the 1920s as a self-taught photographer; he worked for newspapers and magazines covering news and events, shooting fashion spreads and advertisements, and publishing art photography in magazines and pictorials such as the *Young Companion*. Over time, he developed a signature style marked by misty landscapes and elegant pictures of flora and fauna in the style of traditional Chinese painting. Then, in the 1930s, he laid claim to a practice he called “composite photography” (*jijin sheying* 集锦摄影), which uses combination printing and other darkroom methods to assemble photographic fragments into seamless landscapes, still lifes, and portraits following the tropes of composition and style from traditional Chinese ink painting. He soon earned a reputation with the country’s budding photography circles. Despite his fame in Shanghai, however, when the Communists rose to power, in 1949, Lang followed the Nationalist government to Taiwan. He continued to produce photographic works there until the end of his life.

In Taiwan, Lang created mostly monochromatic composite photographs, the majority of which consisted of pictures of dreamy landscapes and fantastical worlds of flowers, birds, and auspicious animals. These photographs might seem to be formulaic, merely an extension of age-old pictorial conventions, pictures of timeless beauty without specific reference and lacking context. A closer look, though, reveals that they in fact do contain references and meanings, hidden from the casual viewer by the clouds and mist. [2],[#N2] In this essay, however, I will focus on a more “personal” body of work: the pictures of a friend, the renowned painter Zhang Daqian (1899–1983).

Lang’s pictures of Zhang, made mostly in the 1950s and ’60s, take on a variety of forms: some look like conventional “studio portraits” (figure 1); others show Zhang in nature (often in his Brazilian garden or California residence, as in figure 2); some embed Zhang in an otherworldly setting (figure 3); others are prints that incorporate Zhang as a small figure (or staffage; 点景人物 *dianjing renwu*) within the landscape elements (in figure 4, for example, Zhang is the middle person in the boat). In almost all these works, which seem to emulate traditional Chinese paintings in terms of composition, motifs, and tropes, Zhang wears his customary robe and hats, emulating literati scholars represented in paintings, especially Su Shi (1037–1101), the great Song scholar, poet, and artist who is one of the icons among Chinese scholar-artists. [3],[#N3]



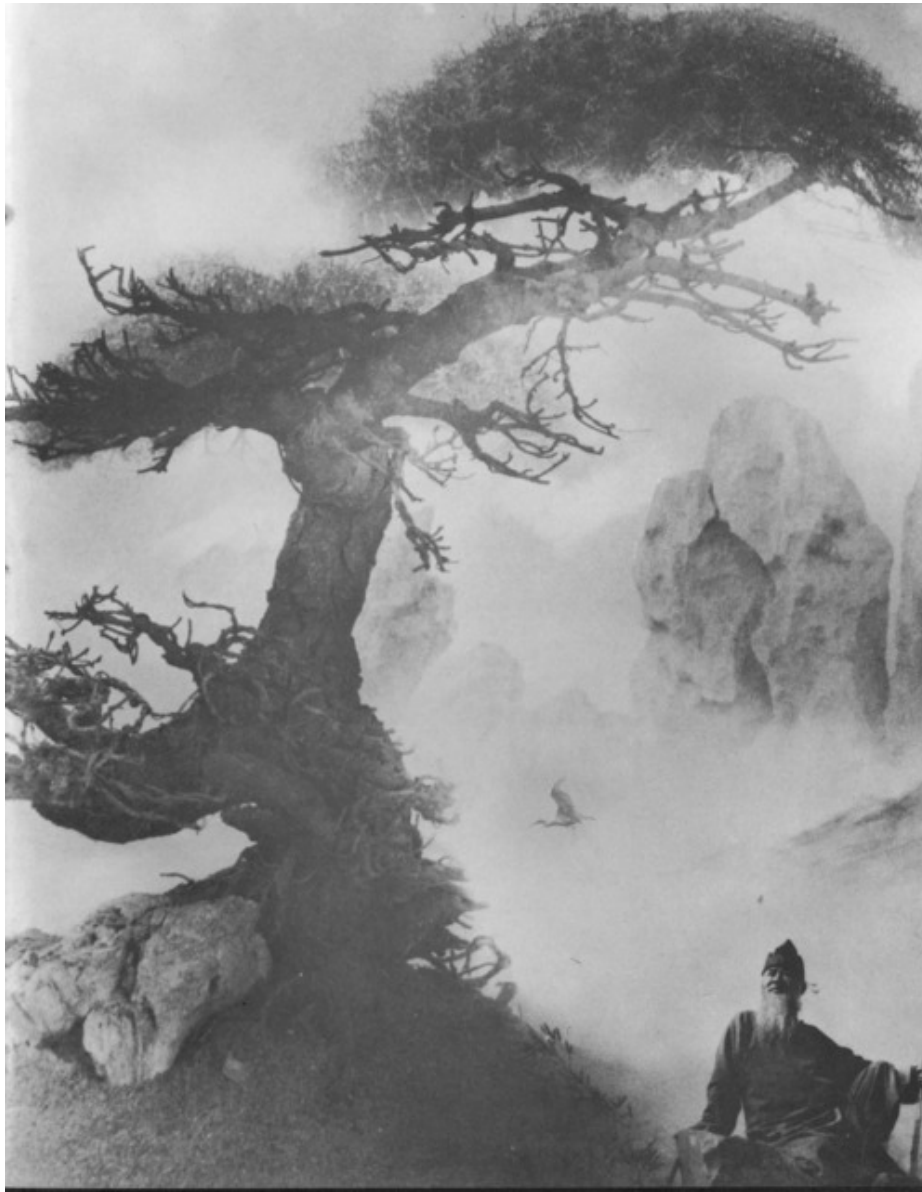
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subview=detail;view=entry](http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573.0006.106-00000001/1?subview=detail;view=entry)]

*Fig. 1. Lang Jingshan, Yanzuo wangji (Without the Concerns of This World), c. 1963, composite photograph reproduced in Badeyuan shejing.*



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*Fig. 2. Lang Jingshan, Xiyang fu zhang gui (Returning in Sunset), c. 1963, composite photograph reproduced in Badeyuan shejing.*



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*Fig. 3. Lang Jingshan, Cansong gaoshi (Lofty Scholar under a Pine Tree), c. 1963, composite photograph reproduced in Badeyuan shejing.*



[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573.0006.106-00000004/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

Fig. 4. Lang Jingshan, *Yi zhou dang guo wanchong jiang (One Boat Crossing Thousands of Rivers)*, 1963, composite photograph.

Why did Lang use Zhang Daqian in his landscapes? And why Zhang Daqian as Su Shi? How are we to understand this reiterated mimicry or imitation and the double suspension of “reality” in photographic portraiture? The answers to these questions may lie in the notion of “emulation”: a key to unlock the complexities surrounding Lang’s work, his engagement with the past, across media, and between the photographer and his sitter.

## Lang Jingshan and Zhang Daqian: A Centennial Friendship

Zhang Daqian, the recurring hero in much of Lang’s work, was one of the twentieth century’s most famous painters in the traditional ink-and-water medium. Like Lang, although a few years earlier—in the 1920s—Zhang made his fame in Shanghai. The men, introduced to each other by Zhang’s brother, Zhang Shanzi (1882-1940), also a painter, became friends.

Zhang helped Lang forge his photographic language. It was the Zhang brothers who introduced him to the Huangshan mountains: the scenic peaks in eastern China that had inspired many masters of landscape painting and enthralled photographers with their atmospheric beauty, and would instantly become a lasting love for Lang. Indeed, those mountains launched Lang’s interest in composite photography. [4],[#N4]

After that first Huangshan trip, Lang came back to Shanghai to make some of his earliest attempts at composite photography. He returned on five occasions, and those peaks continued to have a place even in his later works. [5],[#N5] There are at least two recorded photographs Lang took during that first trip with the brothers. One of them is dated 1932, a composite picture made from a negative of Zhang Shanzi sitting in front

of Qipingsong and other photographic and painted elements (see fig. 5). [6][#N6] Thirty years later, in 1962, Zhang Daqian wrote an inscription on this print: “My late second brother Shanzi visited Huangshan at the age of 51; Mr. Lang Jingshan took a picture of him by Qipingsong in Shizilin.” Written while Zhang was living in Brazil—and at around the same time when Lang was making many portraits of Zhang, emphasizing the exact location and time—this is an emotionally charged note commemorating a seminal point in their careers and in their lives.



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*Fig. 5. Lang Jingshan, Zhang Shanzi, 1932, composite photograph. The inscription was written by Zhang Daqian in 1962.*

Lang and Zhang Daqian maintained their brotherly relationship over the next decade and beyond. More than twenty years after they met, in 1948 they were both invited to Taiwan as part of the Nationalist government’s propaganda efforts to promote the island. Their itinerary was curtailed abruptly with the imminent Nationalist defeat by the Communists on the mainland; they had to leave the island in haste to prepare their families for the move. [7]. [N7] Although Zhang did not return to Taiwan in the first few decades after 1949 and instead settled first in South America and then in California, the two managed to visit each other and take trips together, and supported each other’s work.

In 1963 and 1965, while Zhang was still living in his *Badeyuan* (Eight Virtues Garden) in Brazil, Lang visited him twice and took many pictures of Zhang on the estate. Some of these pictures were published in *Badeyuan shejing* (Scenes from Eight Virtues Garden) in 1966. Two years later, in 1968, a very similar work titled *Zhang Daqian xiansheng yingzhan* (Exhibition of Photography of Mr. Zhang Daqian) was published, most likely the fruit of Lang’s visit to Zhang’s residence after Zhang’s move to Carmel, California. [8]. [N8] Each seems to be a catalogue of an exhibition. Given the few if any reviews of the exhibitions and the limited number of editions in print, however, it seems that neither the exhibits nor the “catalogues” had any influence as public events promoting Zhang as an artist of the top rank. Rather, perhaps the catalogues were personal photo albums, memorabilia shared by the two friends.

## Zhang Daqian as Su Shi

The majority of the pictures in the two albums can be viewed as more or less “conventional” portraits of Zhang Daqian, as Zhang is clearly the main subject, the center of attention. This is very unlike other pictures, in which Zhang appears only as a minuscule figure, not identifiable to anyone who does not know him (see again figure 4). But one of the striking aspects of all these pictures—the ones in the albums and in many taken before and after them—is Zhang’s posture and his sartorial choices.

Zhang often appears in a costume that is recognizable as one worn by Su Shi in some of his best-known portraits. This particular outfit of Su Shi, especially the distinctive headwear called a *dongpo* hat, has been part of the established iconography of Su. The later paintings of Su, such as the aforementioned portrait by Zhao Mengfu, all depict him in this black hat. Lang’s album *Badeyuan* contains twenty pictures, and fourteen of them feature Zhang (the rest are pictures of his gardens), and in all but one Zhang is wearing this *dongpo* costume. Among the twenty-four pictures of Zhang in *Zhang Daqian xiansheng yingzhan*, fourteen depict Zhang in his *dongpo* outfit. Almost all of the pictures, in both albums, portray him holding a curved walking stick. With such a staff in hand, Zhang seems always to be wandering, embodying the poet-artist in perpetual exile, as Su Shi portrayed himself in his poems.

Zhang sometimes dressed in the same way in his day-to-day life. Writes biographer Wang Zhiyi: “Mr. Zhang often strolls in his Brazilian garden at sunset, wearing a long robe and a *dongpo* hat, holding a longevity staff in his hand, a little gourd dangling on top of the staff . . . a virtual picture of an immortal in a celestial realm.” [9]. [N9] Zhang traveled the world in this attire (figure 6). He also painted many paintings featuring Su Shi or himself in the same costume (an example of this can be found in the [National Museum of History](http://collections.culture.tw/nmh_collectionsweb/CollectionInfo.aspx?GID=155508&RNO=75-03617) [http://collections.culture.tw/nmh\_collectionsweb/CollectionInfo.aspx?GID=155508&RNO=75-03617]). Zhang is said to have custom ordered his *dongpo* outfits from a movie-industry costume designer and specified an imitation of the portrait of Su Shi by Zhao Mengfu. [10]. [N10] In Zhang’s case, life imitates art, and art (photography and painting) imitates that life which imitates art.



[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573.0006.106-00000006/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

Fig. 6. Lang Jingshan, Untitled (portrait of Zhang Daqian), photograph.

Zhang Daqian’s rather dramatic and flamboyant wardrobe is the result of a conscious effort to impersonate, role-play, and masquerade as Su Shi, the great polymath poet, artist, and gourmet, and one of the founding literati artists in the Song Dynasty, a man who happened to hail from the area in Sichuan from which Zhang also came.

Interestingly, in *Badeyuan*, Zhang (as Su Shi) is depicted both in “straight” photographs (photographs that appear to be free of obvious manipulation) and in *jijin* pictures. For example, “Returning in Sunset with a Staff” (see again figure 2) shows Zhang in a natural landscape; on the other hand, “Entering the Mist in Morning,” a *jijin* picture, positions Zhang in an abstract and surreal landscape of mist in which all natural settings are blurry and lit in a dreamlike wash (figure 7). In “Returning,” Zhang has his feet on the ground. The landscape, although clearly constructed according to Zhang’s best attempts at the time to re-create a Chinese estate worthy of a classical artist, still strikes one as a bit “wild” or even “foreign.” The trees are tall and lively in the background; the bamboo stalks portend little of the classical elegance often seen in paintings; the

vegetation in the middle ground appears rampant and unruly; the dark and coarse soil under Zhang’s scholarly garb is in opposition to the “dustless” world of a lofty scholar; and the deep vista seems to be open and natural, different from the refined and manicured views usually associated with a classical Chinese scholar’s garden. In a word, in this picture Zhang as Su Shi seems to be wandering in a “primitive” landscape.



[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573.0006.106-00000007/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

Fig. 7. Lang Jingshan, *Qinchen ru yunwu (Entering the Mist in Morning)*, composite photograph reproduced in *Badeyuan shejing*.

By contrast, a *jijin* picture such as “Entering the Mist” appears extremely “unreal”: the ground and Zhang’s feet are erased and Zhang is suspended in the twilight of a dreamlike world. Such a celestial setting highlights a desire to envision oneself in the imaginary home of peace and harmony, even if it be only a “garden” in the air.

On the one hand, the two pictures form a pairing of *yin* and *yang* and *shi* and *xu* (solid and empty), as often noted in Chinese philology, but on the other hand they heighten the ambivalence inherent in Zhang’s exile.

Zhang talks about his life in South America as “*touhuang* 投荒” (to delve into the wilderness), the same word Su Shi used before he crossed the ocean to Danzhou (Hainan island). <sup>[11]</sup><sub>[#N11]</sub> (“Throwing oneself into the wilderness” indicates a sense of being removed from the center of civilization, which is China, according to Zhang.) But he also describes himself as a “*biqinren* 避秦人” (literally, “one who keeps away from the tyranny of Emperors of Qin”), one seeking refuge from the chaos of war and corruption in a Peach Blossom Spring–like utopia. In a painting he made with Pu Xinyu, he inscribed this verse: “We meet each other, talking about clouds and water, wondering if we were both outcasts seeking refuge [*biqinren*].” <sup>[12]</sup><sub>[#N12]</sub>

This sense of an imaginary utopia is evident in both the jarring archaic garb that Zhang wears within a natural landscape in São Paulo and the deliberately eerie misty world in which he seems to be suspended within the *jijin* pictures. However, although Zhang creates a Chinese garden in a place far from his spiritual home and dresses up as a Song scholar in the twentieth century and although Lang makes portraits of him as such, both men are keenly aware that such images not only are expressions of desire but in fact also heighten the sense of loss and exile. In the context of the turmoil of the years when the Communists claimed victory over the Nationalists and Lang and Zhang subsequently left China, the commentary on this physical, political, and cultural displacement is brought to light through these emulative portraits of Zhang as Su Shi, the tragic hero literati artist who was forced into exile in the wilderness, but never became a “barbarian.”

São Paulo in Brazil; California in the United States; Lang’s photographic celestial realm: all are the foreign land of a real refuge and the imaginary world removed from real turmoil. Zhang, then, is both land owner and stranger—completely, even comically, out of time and place.

## Zhang Daqian: Performing Lang’s Landscape of Displacement

Lang and Zhang were indeed outcasts. Entangled in the Nationalist political network, they had to flee the mainland, but they missed their lost homes and lost homeland. Lang’s *jijin* works in Taiwan repeatedly presented allegories of a nation and the story of artists stranded in the void of political and cultural displacement. The fragments he used have their symbolic and emotional meanings, and the image of Zhang Daqian is itself a symbol.

In “*Yanbo yaoting*” (Rowing among the Misty Waves), created in the early 1950s (figure 8), the reeds in the foreground are taken from the outskirts of Taipei; the three-man boat, two rowers with a lone passenger, is taken from Hong Kong; and the background is from the iconic mountains of Huangshan. (Lang made other, similar versions repeating the formula, but sometimes substituted the background peaks with other famous mountains of the mainland.) This particular boat comes from a picture Lang took in Hong Kong during his flight to Taiwan in October 1949, when he was in anxious transition to an unknown future on the island (figure 9). <sup>[13]</sup><sub>[#N13]</sub>



[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573.0006.106-0000008/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

*Fig. 8. Lang Jingshan, Yanbo yaoting, 1951, composite photograph.*



[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573.0006.106-0000009/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

*Fig. 9. Lang Jingshan, Small Ferry Boat in Hong Kong, 1949, photograph.*

This Hong Kong boat must have represented a significant moment in Lang’s memory. One can see the man, imbued with personal emotion and memory, in the boat in Hong Kong as a stand-in for Lang, and view the picture *Yanbo yaoting* as both an autobiographical episode and a symbol of the tumultuous times. However, in later *jjin* pictures, he uses Zhang, in the Su Shi costume, as a replacement for the lone passenger in the small boat (figure 10). In addition to the strong friendship, the similar exodus experience they shared, and Zhang’s notoriety as a spokesperson for traditional Chinese painting in the 1960s, Lang must have seen in Zhang dressed as Su Shi an especially compelling and provocative image for his allegorical photography.



[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/tapic/x-7977573.0006.106-00000010/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

Fig. 10. Lang Jingshan, *Yanbo yaoting*, 1963, composite photograph.

Drawing on the rich depository of Su Shi’s iconography, Zhang Daqian’s image in these landscapes creates a complex manipulation of time and space, as it constructs a connection between the Song Dynasty, 1049, and the present, and between China, Hong Kong, Brazil, Taiwan, and the utopia of timeless home. Moreover, in these prints, “Su Shi” is seated in a boat, instead of contemplating history and time in the river under the historical Red Cliff (see Su’s famous “Red Cliff,” written in 1008). Lang finds himself in the 1960s facing a phantom landscape made of fragments of memory pieced together through a photographic device. As it is a *jijin* world made of real negatives, this is a landscape suspended between real and unreal.

In Lang’s composite picture printing process, to create these pictures he would have to paste a small image of Zhang over the original person in the boat. If we understand the small figure in the Hong Kong boat as the vessel bearing the pathos of Lang’s own exodus, the three are literally one, bound together, superimposed on one another, sharing a communion of exile and displacement.

## Photography and Painting: Lang Jingshan and a Chinese Pictorialism

In Lang’s art, this sense of displacement, although a commentary on the shared historical experience among many who moved to Taiwan and beyond in 1949, is often interpreted as an art of conservative and escapist taste, a yearning for a return to an imaginary utopia of China and Chinese art.

Also problematic for some critics is that Lang’s photography theory consistently promoted what he understood to be Chinese Pictorialism. In writing and in practice, Lang remained an advocate for Pictorialism in China and Taiwan well into the 1990s. [14],[#N14]. He was knowledgeable about its concepts and its practice since the 1920s, and a decade later he articulated his theories of a Chinese Pictorialism, arguing for making pictures according to the compositional and aesthetic principles in traditional Chinese paintings. [15],[#N15]. He believed that

photography had to be manipulated for it to qualify as “art,” and that the artistic forms to guide these manipulations had to be found in the canons of traditional Chinese art.

“Our nation has always promoted culture and the arts,” he wrote in 1941, “therefore Chinese painting and music have developed earliest in the world and these ancient artistic principles are still sufficient to be models for today. My photography is overall based on Chinese painting.” [16],[#N16] Lang later repeated the proclamation that his composite photography emulated the principles of Chinese painting, and it is precisely this emulation that distinguishes his photography from the commonplace practice of combinational printing and montage. He said that his composite photography, informed by Chinese painting, “strives for a picture that re-creates my subjective impression; it has to have depth, planes, focus.” [17],[#N17] He implied that montage in the West was merely a show of technique, whereas his composite photography was real art.

Lang persisted in his belief in these principles, and this became a point of contention among photographers with different ideals. The disagreement seems to center on the concept of “emulation.” Liu Bannong, the first Chinese author of a book on photographic aesthetics, had already written, in 1927—before Lang articulated the meaning of his composite photography—that for photography to emulate painting is a “grave mistake”: “the two media have many correlations, but they each have their own nature and cannot emulate each other. If one believes that the purpose of photography is to emulate painting, why not go ahead and do painting then?” [18]

[#N18]

During the 1930s, artists who shared a sense of social responsibility during the nation’s crisis and then war had stronger words to say against the Pictorialists’ removal from social reality, especially as Lang’s interpretation of Chinese Pictorialism emulated a painting tradition (literati painting according to Lang’s own belief) that was already susceptible to criticism that it was an art of elitist escapism. Lu Shifu wrote that the Pictorialist creations were effete works that indicated the photographers “did not at all understand what photography really is.” [19],[#N19]

Although the cultural context in the Nationalist-governed Republican China (1911–49) was very different from that in the Nationalist-governed Taiwan, the contention surrounding what photography should do and what it should look like struck a similar chord. In Taiwan, Deng Nanguang, in the 1960s, argued for a photography directly depicting the real life of real people, even as Zhuang Ling took a modernist stand “in strong opposition to Pictorialism.” [20],[#N20] In the 1980s, Guo Lixin and Xiao Jiaqing insisted that Lang’s incessant and repetitive imitation of traditional Chinese literati art betrayed a lack of originality or creativity and revealed a lack of understanding of photography’s ontological autonomy, by which they meant the technology’s independence from painting. [21],[#N21]

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, a few years after Lang’s death, Bao Kun, in the mainland, wrote a now well-known piece announcing the bankruptcy of Lang’s Pictorialism. Besides championing photography’s inherent mission to engage with political action, Bao’s main issue with Lang lay in the concept of “emulation” (*mofang*, 模仿; the Chinese word *mofang* can also be translated as copy, imitation, mimicry. I use “emulation” here for the sake of convenience and will tackle the linguistic issue later.) Not only did Bao deem that Lang’s “imitative” work betrayed photography’s medium specificity (which Bao held as “documentary” and “instantaneous”), but he was also palpably frustrated with the culture of emulation that Lang promoted and helped institutionalize: many contemporary Chinese photographers “blindly” imitated and worshipped Lang’s style and the field became dominated by this “effete,” “cowardly,” and insulated aestheticism. [22],[#N22]

On the other hand, Bao contrasts Lang’s composite photography with the art of Jerry Uelsmann, and holds that Lang’s inferiority lies precisely in that he was content with “*mofang*” and did not step into “creation” (*chuangzao*, 创造); he failed to “deconstruct, subvert” the ancient Chinese literati tradition and “create new meanings.” [23],[#N23]

## Emulation, Imitation, and *Mofang*

Although these assertions contain valid points, they require careful examination. I have argued on another occasion that Lang’s Pictorialist career does not lack social-political critical engagement, as is often imagined. [24].[#N24]. The notion of “emulation,” however, goes beyond understanding Lang’s art in its sociopolitical contexts, as it is a salient concept that can help unravel several key aspects of his work.

Lang’s portraits of Zhang—in all the forms they take and as a significant component in Lang’s oeuvre—provide excellent examples we can use to demonstrate the complexities of emulation and its discursive reverberations. On the one hand, the Chinese critical language about Lang is tightly moored to the problematic interpretation of emulation in the twentieth- and twenty-first-century West. On the other hand, Lang’s practice is shaped mostly by a Chinese art tradition that has its own complicated history of “emulation.”

I use the word *emulation* in my translation of “*mofang*” in these critics’ writing, but *emulation* can be used interchangeably with *copy*, *imitation*, or *mimicry*. In the history of Chinese art, however, the notion of copying encompasses a rich variety of practices: *lin* 临, *mo* 摹, *fang* 仿, *fa* 法, *ni* 拟, for example, all of which are often conflated, in translation, with words such as *copy* and *emulation*, with the result that subtle distinctions are lost. “*Fang*” takes on different meanings and values at different times. Martin Powers points out that “*fang*,” the word most often associated with “imitation,” has historically evolved from “imitation” to “not imitation at all but rather a kind of pictorial commentary on classical traditions.” [25].[#N25]

One of Xie He’s six principles of Chinese painting, esteemed as a canonical text for Chinese art, is “*chuan yi mo xie*,” usually translated as “transmission by copying.” [26].[#N26]. Chinese art tradition did value imitation as an essential process for an artist to learn his craft and to know where he stands in relation to the past. Contemporary art historian Wen Fong sees “imitation” as an integral part of Chinese visual art and argues that the great masters were seen as vanguards who “effected change not through technical inventions but by resurrecting ancient truths,” [27].[#N27]. illuminating an ambivalent engagement with the past as a field open to both imitation and invention.

In all cases, “*fang*” in the context of Chinese art contains little indication of negativity, but instead embraces a variety of activities, such as commentary on the classics, transmission, and reappropriation. Indeed, it was long a norm in the pedagogy and practice of Chinese art. However, many contemporary Chinese critics, among them Bao Kun, used the word *mofang* as an equivalent of the English word *imitation*, borrowing the negative connotations of the foreign term. Imitation in today’s critical discourses is generally denigrated, and its extreme form, forgery, is considered a moral and a legal trespass. Imitation also implies the work of a “hack,” devoid of originality and innovation, or work that takes a conservative stance, seemingly similar but drastically different from the avant-garde’s playful parodic subversion. (Bao Kun’s comparison between Lang and Uelsmann is a case in point.)

Interestingly, in his own writing Lang explained his understanding and application of Xie He’s “transmission by copying.” Following a different version of the phrase *chuan yi mo xie* 传移模写, he called it “*chuan mo yi xie*” and argued that the reason Chinese traditional art “copies” others’ work lies in the fact that it is difficult for a beginning painter to “copy” from nature (*duijing xiesheng*) [28].[#N28]; therefore, it is advisable to copy (*linmo* 临摹) others’ painted landscapes first. Whereas copying (*chuan mo* 传模) is the primary way to approach nature, Lang says, “*yi xie*” is exactly the method of “*jijin*.” [29].[#N29]. In effect, he interprets “*chuan mo yi xie*” not as “transmission by copying,” but, rather, as emulating great landscape work by cleverly “shifting” (*yi*) the elements to make a picture (*xie*). The English translation of the phrase that he officially used in “How to Make Composite Pictures,” the English article through which he introduced his photographic art to the West, is “modeling on classical patterns by clever translation.” [30].[#N30]. In other words, his understanding of

copying is not mechanical copying; it is both the start of an apprentice and the end of a creative master: one who can forge his own “translation” of the classical models.

## Emulation: Between a Photographer and His Sitter

Lang engaged in this form of “emulation” on many fronts. Pictorialist photography in general has already been known as the art’s attempt to emulate painting, and Lang Jingshan’s particular *jijin sheying* had an emulative relationship with the past, frequently citing the Six Principles and insisting on continuing the mission to resurrect the “ancient truths” (figure 11). [31],[#N31]. Differentiating his “composite photography” from combination printing and photomontage in the West, Lang claimed that his “*jijin*” was superior because it aimed to re-create the image that he (an artist) saw and imagined, [32],[#N32] and apparently what he saw was already an image informed by Chinese pictorial art. [33],[#N33]



[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/topic/x-7977573.0006.106-00000011/1?subview=detail;view=entry>]

Fig. 11. Lang teaching about the Six Principles, 1950s.

Interestingly, on the charge of “imitation,” the subject of Lang’s portraiture works, Zhang Daqian, was the recipient of similar criticism. Though a painter much revered for his talent and finesse, not everyone agreed with that assessment and his reputation was rather mottled. His contemporary Fu Lei commented, “Zhang was an opportunist; his own creation was at best stealing a few scraps from Taochi, or to borrow some flowers from Chen Baiyang, Xu Qingteng (Xu Wei) or Bada . . . the results are often incredibly vulgar.” Worse still, Fu pointed out, “his most significant talent is to make forgeries of Shitao, at which he was first rate.” [34].[#N34] It is widely understood that Zhang was an expert forger of Shitao (1642–1707), the Qing artist admired for his originality; Zhang began in Shanghai, in the 1920s, and continued to paint quantities of forgeries throughout his lifetime. His “emulation” crossed the ethical threshold, and he became known as one of the world’s most notorious forgers. (Because of Zhang’s talent, however, prestigious museums today still grapple with the shadows of suspicion regarding the authenticity of some of their treasured pieces. [35].[#N35].) As a photographer known for imitating traditional Chinese paintings, and by featuring an artist with a reputation for copying, Lang’s portraits of Zhang read as a bold statement regarding the problems of emulation.

Meanwhile, Zhang’s masquerade as Su Shi in portraits and in real life can be considered a form of emulation as well. It is important to note that dressing up to be photographed as a form of emulation has a history in China and was an especially popular phenomenon in the late Qing and the early Republic. Cixi, the empress dowager, famously impersonated Guanyin, the bodhisattva of mercy, in photo portraits. Records of early photographic history show parties of cultural luminaries impersonating Buddhist deities. [36].[#N36] As Yuhang Li’s study of Cixi suggests, dressing up is a “method of entering the character [that] combines elements from both theatrical performance and Buddhist meditation.” [37].[#N37]

Although taking portraits in Su Shi’s clothes might not amount to religious devotion, it may be seen as a form of ardent desire to perform *shen-hui*, or “spiritual communion,” as Vinograd noted in his study of Chinese portraiture. On both the spiritual level of admiration and the expedient level of advancing one’s reputation, the emulative portrait as Su Shi is a theatrical way to seek contact with the past artist through “retrospective musings, in which belated cultural practice was validated by claimed affinities with prestigious precursors.” [38].[#N38]

However, in addition to expressing admiration and seeking validation through a “desperate, incantatory invocation of lineage” (in Vinograd’s words), Lang’s portraits of Zhang can signify another form of participation in the narrative of Su Shi. Zhang must have empathized with Su Shi’s experience of exile (Su was unjustly demoted from the court and then made his home in various remote lands, such as the tropical island of Hainan, at the very edges of the empire). Zhang had a remarkable relocation record after he fled China, in 1949: he moved from Hong Kong to Japan, to India, to Argentina, to Brazil, and to California, before eventually settling in Taiwan. As Svetlana Alpers and Michael Baxandall aptly observed, emulating is essentially working in the manner of someone else. It is a form of “performing,” or putting on the character of another, with all the self-consciousness and retention of identity natural to an actor with a strong personality. [39].[#N39] Zhang’s emulation of Su rose to the literal level of performing “in character,” proclaiming his aspiration to rival Su’s status as a great scholar-artist and fantasizing that he himself possessed the same spirit and talent, yet simultaneously betraying the sense of loss and displacement felt by a painter in a Chinese traditional medium who could not return to his ancestral home.

The theme of emulation does not end with Lang making Su Shi and Zhang a doubly superimposed avatar of a Chinese scholar-artist in exile. The relationship between the photographer and the sitter is also one of emulative rivalry. Lang’s Pictorialist ideals meant he saw himself as a photographer whose role was to emulate the role of a painter (like Zhang) in the darkroom. Both Lang and Zhang revered Chinese traditional arts, and each harbored ambitions to spread his own emulation of traditional art out in the world. [40].[#N40] In reality, though, they also collaborated in making works of art. [41].[#N41]

Lang regarded Zhang as the best artist of his time, but he fancied himself his equal in the medium of photography. Even as Zhang had plans to conquer the international art world, Lang’s ardent embrace of Pictorialist salons in the West testifies to his similar ambition as a photographer. [42].[#N42] To Lang, Zhang represented the peak of contemporary Chinese artistic achievement as a kind of composite (*jijin*) artist. In Zhang’s eclectic and versatile style of painting, in his methods and comprehensive knowledge of Chinese art history, Lang found the best validation for his own composite photography. He wrote:

Chinese painting’s principle “*yingwu xiangxing*” can be a model for Realism; “*suilei fucai*” for Impressionism; “*chuanmo yixie*” and “*jingying weizhi*” for Superrealism; “*qiyun shengdong*” for Abstract Expressionism. These are all fundamental prerequisites in Chinese painting, but in the West they were each treated as an individual school. That is why as soon as Picasso, the master of European painting, met Zhang Daqian and saw his painting, he said, “It is China that should be the place to learn painting.” [43].[#N43]

Lang was referring to the meeting, in 1961, between Zhang and Picasso in Paris. According to the enthusiastic Taiwanese and Hong Kong press, Zhang came out of this meeting as the Oriental Picasso. Lang suggested rather that in this summit encounter between two painting traditions, the Western Picasso voluntarily conceded to the Oriental Picasso, acknowledging the superiority of the Chinese painting tradition. In an interesting emulative maneuver, Lang built up Picasso’s brief politeness by referring to the Six Principles, again, the staple of his Chinese Pictorialism. By claiming that all the artistic movements and trends in the West could, in fact, easily be emulating or emulated by the Chinese painting canon, Lang reified the “ancient truths” of Chinese art as the source and goal of emulation of all arts: modernism in the West, Zhang, Picasso, and his own Pictorialist photography.

## Conclusion

James Cahill said that when he met Zhang—whom he called “the most versatile, prolific, and successful forger”—he was extremely impressed by his “extraordinary visual command of the whole past of Chinese painting” because Zhang could casually and on demand re-create on paper any famous painting. [44].[#N44] Cahill referred to Zhang as “a modern Till Eulenspiegel, whose knavery justifies itself by its brilliance.” [45].[#N45] I do not intend to argue away the ethical, legal, and monetary questions that surround forgery, but it is important to recognize the significance of emulation (in its most innocent sense) in the tradition and training of an artist like Zhang. Lang’s photographic portraits of him present a fascinating thesis on the subject of emulation: Zhang as the master of painting (as one emulating the past masters) is the subject of the photographer’s emulation in terms of both medium and practice, as well as of life and artistic ambition. Zhang as a “sitter” is portrayed as performing the image of a Song scholar, while Lang as the artist, by making these images, participates in a self-referential narrative of Chinese artists suspended by history and in exile from their spiritual and physical home.

Meanwhile, at issue here is also emulation across different media. Lang believed in “beauty” tried and true and paid little attention to the autonomy of medium itself. Often he seems to remark on the inadequacy of the photographic medium, especially when compared to painting. He wrote that “photography is hampered by its mechanical nature” and therefore cannot create the ideal picture as painting could. [46].[#N46] Unlike the late modernists in the West who championed innovation as unmoored from the past, his appropriation of tradition has no sense of irreverence or rebellion but quite the opposite. Lang also displayed a fundamental difference from the postmodernist intervention on “copying,” which tended to dissolve, deny, or deride the original

meaning of the reference. Lang’s emulation, on the contrary, still embraces the original without irony or parody, with no intention to become one of the avant-garde or pseudo-avant-garde. [\[47\]](#).[\[#N47\]](#)

The contemporary critics’ unease with Lang’s art, besides reflecting the residue of the modern myth of originality, revealed their unease with the notion of emulation itself. In this essay I have not used emulation as a value-judgment meter, nor have I argued for the inventive value of Lang’s emulative photography. Rather, I have shown that Lang’s approach to photography, although it does not conform to the dominant rhetoric that all discursive treatment of tradition can be legitimized only by a critical irony or transgression, is not devoid of historical and formal critical discourse.

If emulation can be taken as a form of critical intervention and as performative and inventive, Lang’s portraits of Zhang present a complex relationship between tradition on the one hand, and on the other they open up a space of ambiguity. Emulation is not only a proactive field of ambiguity between stylistic imitation and invention, between an imported medium and a depository of indigenous art tradition, between the artist and his sitter, but also, through its enactment of the past, it performs an active engagement with contemporary sociopolitical reality. Its critical power lies in the fact that it is able to bring together “rhyming” images, even though they cross the threshold of history, medium, and the boundaries separating artist and subject.

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## Notes

1. For the names in this article, I use pinyin for the sake of convenience and consistency, even though Lang’s name has appeared variously as Lang Ching-shan, Chin-san Long, and other representations. [♣\[#N1-ptr1\]](#)
2. See Mia Yinxing Liu, “The Allegorical Landscape: Lang Jingshan’s Photography in Context,” in *Archives of Asian Art*, forthcoming, fall 2015. [♣\[#N2-ptr1\]](#)
3. For a discussion of Lang’s imitation of literati paintings, see Chen Pao-Chen, “*Wenrenhua de yanshen—Lang Jingshan de sheying yishu*” (The Extension of Literati Painting—Lang Jingshan’s Photographic Art), in *Gugong wenwu yuekan* (The National Palace Museum Monthly of Chinese Art), vol. 20, no. 10 (2003), 42–57. [♣\[#N3-ptr1\]](#)
4. Xiao Yongsheng cites an article written by Lang titled “Remembering My Huangshan Photography,” (*Huangshan sheying zai ji*) in which Lang reminisces about his trip to the Huangshan peaks with Zhang Daqian. See Xiao Yongsheng, *Huayi, Jijin, Lang Jingshan*, Taipei: Xiongshi meishu, 2004; 120. [♣\[#N4-ptr1\]](#)
5. *Chunshu qifeng* (Spring Tree and Majestic Peaks), sometimes considered Lang’s first published *jijin* picture, was thought to be a product of his trip with Zhang. See Xiao, *ibid.* [♣\[#N5-ptr1\]](#)
6. The other photograph was supposedly a picture taken by Lang of Zhang at Mingxian Spring in Huangshan. The entry was collected in the catalogue of *Lang Jingshan sheying zhuankan*, vol. 2, in 1941 but the actual work is now missing. See Xiao, *Huayi*, 119. [♣\[#N6-ptr1\]](#)
7. Xu Qitai, *Zhang Daqian de Badeyuan shijie 1953–1989*, Taipei: Taiwan shangwu, 2003; 1–2. [♣\[#N7-ptr1\]](#)
8. Lang Jingshan, *Badeyuan shejing*, Taipei: Zhongguo wenhua xueyuan, 1966. Lang Jingshan, *Zhang Daqian xiansheng yingzhan*, 1968, unknown publisher, possible the same one that published *Badeyuan*. [♣\[#N8-ptr1\]](#)

9. Wang Zhiyi, *Wo de pengyou Zhang Daqian*, Taipei: Hanyi shengyan, 1993; 33. [♣.\[#N9-ptri\]](#)
10. He Gongshang, *The Paintings of Chang Dai-Chien*, Taipei, Art Book Co., Ltd, 2014; 136. [♣.\[#N10-ptri\]](#)
11. Zhang Daqian has several inscriptions, such as “It has been ten years since I delved into the wilderness and lived the life of a beggar, the dream of return to Qingcheng Mountain at my home is no longer attainable” and “The elders in my village must have been all gone now, with tears and a brush I try to remember the past. It has been ten years since I delved into the wilderness and my will has been exhausted, while the plan to return is still empty and afar.” See Xu Qitai, *Zhang Daqian’s Badeyuan World 1953–1989*, Taipei: Taiwan shangwu chubanshe, 2003; 3. Su Shi also used the phrase when he wrote, “Today I of the old age delve into the wilderness, there is no hope of return alive.” In “Yu Wang Minzhong ba shou.” *Su Shi ji*, Taiyuan: Shanxi guji chubanshe, 2006. 71. [♣.\[#N11-ptri\]](#)
12. See Zhang Daqian’s *Gaoshitu* (Picture of Lofty Scholars) (1950s) in National History Museum, Taipei. [♣.\[#N12-ptri\]](#)
13. For a detailed discussion on this series of photos, see my article “The Allegorical Landscape.” [♣.\[#N13-ptri\]](#)
14. For his activities in promoting Pictorialism, see Xiao Yongsheng, *Huayi, jijin, Lang Jingshan* (Pictorialism, Composite Pictures, Lang Jingshan), Taipei, *Jiating meishuguan, Xiongshi tushu*, 2004. [♣.\[#N14-ptri\]](#)
15. See Lang, “*Sheying yu Zhongguo huihua*” (Photography and Chinese Painting Art), in *Sheying yishu lunji* (Collection of Essays on Photography Art), Taipei: *Zhongguo sheying xuehui*, 1955. [♣.\[#N15-ptri\]](#)
16. Lang, preface to “*Lang Jingshan sheying zhuankan di er ji*” (special edition of Lang Jingshan’s *Photography*, vol. 2), 1941, cited in Xiao, 135. [♣.\[#N16-ptri\]](#)
17. Lang, “*Jijin jianshuo*” (A Brief Introduction to My Composite Photography), *Zhongmei yuekan*, vol. 9, 4 (1964), 5. [♣.\[#N17-ptri\]](#)
18. Liu Bannong, *Bannong tanying*, Shanghai: Kaiming shudian, 1934; 65. [♣.\[#N18-ptri\]](#)
19. Lu Shifu, “*Wo de yishu sheying guan*” (My View on Art Photography), originally published in *Sheying zhoukan*, vol. 1, issue 3, 1938. Collected in Long Xizu, ed., *Zhongguo jindai sheying yishu meixue wenxuan*, Tianjin: Tianjin renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988; 663. [♣.\[#N19-ptri\]](#)
20. Deng Nanguang, interview, and Zhuang Ling, “Jianli xiandai zhongguo sheying yishu de fangxiang—cong zuijin Taibei de jige yingzhan tanqi” (Constructing an Orientation of Modernist Chinese Photography Art on Some Recent Exhibitions in Taipei), in *Wenxing*, 64, 1963, 2; 45. Cited in Zhou Xiuping’s thesis, *Lang Jingshan (1892–1995): Zhongguo huayi shying yanjiu* (Lang Jingshan: A Study of Chinese Pictorialist Photography), National Central University, Taiwan. 2005, 85. [♣.\[#N20-ptri\]](#)
21. See Guo Lixin, “Zenyang ‘dashi’? Ruhe Zhongguo?” (What “Virtuoso”? How “Chinese?”), in *Shuxie shying: xiangpian de wenben yu wenhua* (Writing Photography: The Texts and Culture of Photos), Taipei, *Yuanzun wenhua*, 1998, 19–28. See also Xiao Jiaqing, “Lang Jingshan shi yidai dashi?” (Lang Jingshan Is a Virtuoso of Photography?), in *Sheyingren*, 5 (1995), 43–48. [♣.\[#N21-ptri\]](#)
22. Bao Kun, “*Xueyue fenghua jin bainian*” (A Hundred Years of Snow, Moon, Wind, and Flowers), in *Yishu pinglun*, 6 (2004), 37–45. [♣.\[#N22-ptri\]](#)
23. Bao, *ibid.* [♣.\[#N23-ptri\]](#)
24. See Mia Yinxing Liu, “Allegory Landscape.” [♣.\[#N24-ptri\]](#)
25. Martin J. Powers, “The Temporal Logic of Citation in Chinese Painting,” in *Art History*, vol. 37 (4), 2014, 744. [♣.\[#N25-ptri\]](#)
26. Susan Bush and Hsiao-Yen Shih, *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1985, 40. [♣.\[#N26-ptri\]](#)
27. Wen Fong, “Why Chinese Painting Is History,” in *Art Bulletin*, vol. 85 (2), June 2003), 263. [♣.\[#N27-ptri\]](#)

28. Lang used “chuan mo yi xie” instead of Xie He’s original phrasing most likely because he copied it from the popular painting manual, *Manual of the Mustard Seed Garden*. ♣[#N28-ptr1]
29. The original Chinese 移寫者實集錦之法, in Lang Jingshan, “Jijin zuofa,” first published in 1941, included in Huagang bowuguan zhencang Lang Jingshan xiansheng jijin sheying, Taipei: Zhongguo wenhua daxue, 1998, 124–27. ♣[#N29-ptr1]
30. Lang Jingshan, “How to Make Composite Pictures,” originally in *The Photographic Journal*, February 1942, 30. ♣[#N30-ptr1]
31. It is worth noting that Lang’s understanding of the painting canons was limited and at times erroneous. See Tang Wei’s “Lang Jingshan ‘Jijin sheying’ de Zhongguo meixue: ‘liufa’ shidu” (The Chinese Aesthetics in Lang Jingshan’s jijin Photography: Misreadings of the “Six Methods”), in *Journal of Nanjing Arts Institute*, May 2013, 114–120. ♣[#N31-ptr1]
32. Lang, *Jijin zhaoxiang*, in *Jijin jianshuo*, n.p., Shanghai, 1941. ♣[#N32-ptr1]
33. Mei Xin and Wu Wanru, interview with Lang, “Yong xiangji xianying bainian suiye,” cited in Chou, 22. ♣[#N33-ptr1]
34. See Fu Lei, *Fu Lei shujian* (Letters of Fu Lei), 32. Shanghai, Sanlian shudian, 2001 (my translation). ♣[#N34-ptr1]
35. See Fu Shen, “Chang Dai-chien’s ‘The Three Worthies of Wu’ and His Practice of Forging Ancient Art,” and Wen Fong, “The Problem of Forgeries in Chinese Painting,” in *Artibus Asiae* XXV, 1962, 95–119; James Cahill, “The Case Against Riverbank: An Indictment in Fourteen Counts,” in *Issues of Authenticity in Chinese Painting*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1999, 12–63; and “Chang Ta-chien’s Forgeries, <http://jamescahill.info/the-writings-of-james-cahill/chang-ta-chiens-forgeries/211-chang-ta-chiens-forgeries> [<http://jamescahill.info/the-writings-of-james-cahill/chang-ta-chiens-forgeries/211-chang-ta-chiens-forgeries>] (accessed April 23, 2015). ♣[#N35-ptr1]
36. See Shen Taimou, “*Donghua suolu*” (Miscellaneous Notes in Old Peking), first published in 1928, collected in Zhang Bofeng, Gu Ya, eds., *Jin dai bai hai* (Unofficial Documents of Modern China), (Chengdu, Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1989), 13, 620–21. ♣[#N36-ptr1]
37. Li, 82. ♣[#N37-ptr1]
38. Richard Vinograd, 125. ♣[#N38-ptr1]
39. Svetlana Alpers and Michael Baxandall, *Tiepolo and the Pictorial Intelligence*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996. ♣[#N39-ptr1]
40. For a thorough discussion, see Fu Shen and Lu Rongzhi, *Zhang Daqian de shijie* (Zhang Daqian’s World), Taipei: Shibao chubanshe, 1998. ♣[#N40-ptr1]
41. For example, in 1963, fifteen of Lang and Zhang’s collaborations were exhibited in Manila. See Zhou, “*Lang Jingshan*,” 186. ♣[#N41-ptr1]
42. He was a member of the Royal Photographic Society in Great Britain, among other organizations, and in 1987 was named an Honorary Fellow by the RPS. ♣[#N42-ptr1]
43. Lang, “Mr. Zhang Daqian and Chinese Painting,” in *Sino-American Monthly*, vol. 4 (1965) 3. ♣[#N43-ptr1]
44. James Cahill, “Chang Ta-Ch’ien’s Forgeries of Old-Master Paintings,” symposium at the Sackler Museum, Washington, D.C., November 22, 1991. ♣[#N44-ptr1]
45. Cahill, *ibid.* ♣[#N45-ptr1]
46. See Lang, *Jingshan jijin zuofa*, originally published in 1958, Taipei: Zhonghua congshu weiyuanhui. Reprinted in Huaying jiangshan, p. 144. ♣[#N46-ptr1]
47. For a critique on the pseudo-avant-garde, see Donald Kuspit, *The Cult of the Avant-garde Artist* (Cambridge, UK, 1993), 102. ♣[#N47-ptr1]

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