

Reflections on traditional contexts and nationalist consciousness in modern Chinese art history

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Abstract: *Modern China is at a stage of substantial change from tradition to modernity, and the relationship between China and the world has undergone a profound transformation. At the same time, literature, history, philosophy and the fine arts, among others, were on a journey towards modernization to varying degrees. The awakening of traditional consciousness in modern China is closely linked to the issue of comparative national culture. Both nationalists and traditionalists in art history have identified themselves in the context of the historical contrast between China and the West. In response to the relationship between Chinese and Western art, the traditionalists argued from a holistic perspective and slowly established the theory of the two sources of art and culture, East and West, and began to rethink the traditional characteristics of Chinese art in a global context. In addition to this, the discovery and summing up of folk art traditions is clearly a crucial achievement in modern Chinese history. While modern art history has become increasingly sophisticated and mature in its study of China's localisation, Chinese art history is still developing at a rapid pace in the face of persistence and change.*

Keywords: *Traditional Context; National Consciousness; Modern Chinese Art History*

In the first half of the 20th century, in response to the increasingly complex and changing situation at home and abroad, cultural exchanges and clashes between Chinese and foreign cultures increased, international political and economic ties became increasingly close, and a wave of study abroad gradually emerged, which made our nationals start to take the initiative to learn from other countries[1]. After returning to China, a large number of foreign students took the initiative to take up the burden of saving the country and the people and the rise of China, in order to seek to achieve the great rejuvenation of the nation[2]. However, under the influence of modern art thinking, the scope of Chinese art was redefined and re-categorised. The development of Chinese society both fully embraced Western ideas and gradually counteracted the encroachment of foreign cultures[3]. The rapid development of Chinese social history during this period was not only unique to the times, but also slowly reverted to a traditional context and a sense of nationalism, which had a profound impact on the rapid development of Chinese art at the present time.

1. The formation and change of traditional contexts in Chinese art history

In terms of its linguistic origins, tradition in modern Chinese grammar refers to the idea of preaching orthodoxy. As an ideological field, it is closely associated with the acronym Daozheng, the acronym for preaching orthodoxy. The awakening of traditional consciousness is usually a product of times of ethnic comparison and ethnic conflict, and is an interpretation of nationalism. For example, some scholars in China have analysed it from the insights of modernisation, and its view that the Daoist or theological category became Daoist during the Hammer King phase of the Southern Song period, which did create a very strong influence. This had little to do with the fact that Li Zong was tired of politics, but rather because after the fall of the Song dynasty, Confucian scholars who were loyal to the Song and did not want to be Mongol officials, devoted themselves to teaching and reached out to the people. An example is the Three Character Classic, a widely circulated and very widespread Taoist bible. Many people memorised it, and even those who could not read or write could simply recite a few lines from it.^[4] During the Yuan dynasty, sermon literature was popular, and the moral standards of the Taoist tradition were also disseminated. For the fallen multitudes clung to their own inherent beliefs. The Taoist tradition, celebrated for its political turmoil under the oppression of other ethnic groups, gradually permeated and flourished into the Taoist tradition of Han society as a whole. At the same time, the Yuan government allowed the use of the doctrine to draw in the literati, so that the doctrinal category flowed unhindered. Imagine a whole society with a complete set of philosophical ideas, and

the adverse effects would have been enormous. The Song dynasty's concept of Daoism had two central connotations, namely, the defence of righteousness and profit, and the firm and strict defence of yixia. It was not only a harmonising tool for the channeling of the interests of different groups of people, but also a huge spiritual shield to defend the Central Plains and the Han civilisation lineage from contamination. The Taoist discourse also embodied a sense of sacred mission, but this also became its flaw. Given the dilemma of objective facts and values, these defenders of Daoism would not hesitate to choose the latter. The thought-provoking tragedy of values arising from Daoism can be recognised in the heated discussions and perceptions of three historical schools: the late Qing school, the late Ming dafu, and the great Confucians of the Song dynasty.

"Around the time of the May Fourth Movement, Taoist consciousness was strongly attacked in the new movement. With the abolition of the imperial examination system and the restructuring of the rural underclass, especially the underclass maintained by retired senior officials, country squires and ordinary literati, Taoist consciousness slowly lost its place. The nationalist ideas derived from the Renaissance in Western countries, the cultural-historical consciousness of the post-Enlightenment period and the sociological ideas of the 19th century to the present day began to quietly take their place^[5] In publications after the late Qing dynasty, the notion that one could be Taoist faded away, and with it came new terms such as national traditions as well as national cultures and traditions. The scholar Schwarz, for example, has done an examination and discussed tradition from a Western perspective, arguing that the concept belongs to the range of words used in Western countries in the 19th new century, which were translated into Chinese in the early 19th century. In the historical context of modern China, the term tradition still retains some of its Taoist connotations to a greater or lesser extent. However, the meaning of tradition in the May Fourth Movement has been divorced from the ideological and moral principles, and it carries with it a strong sense of historical value and cultural awareness, in addition to a distinct moral and political consciousness^[6] Tradition in the context of the current era basically refers to the latter meaning, that is, cultural tradition. The establishment of traditional contexts within modern Chinese art history, however, is a very complex issue that contains not only Western psychological allusions, but also Chinese scholars' reflections on their own cultural and artistic traditions. Naturally, it must be mentioned that they catered to the dual interests of the hopeful world as well as Eastern realism, or distorted their own traditions and artistic traditions in order to contain the West's knotted stones and jockey for dominance over China.

2. A sense of national essence in modern Chinese art history

According to the foregoing, the awakening of traditional consciousness in modern China cannot be separated from a comparative national consciousness. In this case, the birth of the rhetoric of nationalism is of particular interest. The term nationalism, a new term coined in Japan during the Hundred Days' Reform, is a translation of the word 'nationality', which was introduced to China in the 20th century. Before the 1930s, nationalism in China was a far-reaching social idea that was rapidly injected from political consciousness into the realm of art and cultural creation. Such words are mainly reflected and imprinted in the nationalist paintings and plays of the Republican period. Words with a similar meaning to nationalism include national light and national flower, while the antonym for nationalism is national slag, and the neutral word between the two is national deceit.

Early nationalist thought was divided into two trends. One was the radical nationalist ideology of resistance to the Qing and anti-Manchu. The Hao Shu, the Yellow History, and the Book of the Yellow Emperor are all iconic texts of this ideology. The nationalist ideas of the Nationalists were in line with the nationalist ideas prevalent throughout the world at that time, and were also influenced by the emerging cultural archaeology and anthropological production. For example, the early nationalists showed great enthusiasm for the study of the origins of nations and the places where cultures originated. In addition, the last group of Chinese advocates of nationalism were the scholars of 'Sinology', who directly followed the ideas discussed by Wang Fuzhi in the Yellow Book. The second was a cultural preservationist mindset focused on defending the essence of traditional scholarship. The two are more significant than the latter. Culture, and the emergence of the concept of cultural models, was the unmistakable way in which the second of the Nationalists affirmed and explained the value of traditional art. And at the time, this academic vernacular thinking of nationalism, which had little interest in politics, was very much revered by many university teachers and students in the Republican period. More crucially, this movement introduced a new way of looking at culture itself and seeing it as a treasure trove of absolute, meaningful values, a treasure trove to be found outside the political processes of today's society, but which was also a criterion for gauging the state of the process. This concept, together with the criticism of the cosmology that complements its evolution, opens up a new

way of thinking about a metaphysics based on dualism (the opposition between matter and spirit).

On the face of it, the sense of nationalism in modern Chinese history may well seem cumbersome and misplaced. The Hu Society, founded in 1920 in Beijing under the patronage of the great president Xu Shichang, is a case in point. Not only did it compromise the artistic interests of the late Qing dynasty's old and young, but it also confused the Japanese about the art of painting and art in the South. More than that, it was an important spiritual bulwark against Western art. But for the weavers of the Kokusui Journal, the conception is likely to be clearer, manifesting itself in a strong sense of tradition (rather than a fun trend) and a tolerant attitude towards art from Western countries (e.g. the 2 sources theory of Chinese and Western art). Some scholars have argued in the Journal of Nationalism that, given the many changes in the Chinese and Western art worlds today, it is a matter of concern... What is on display here is clearly the fundamental purpose of the Society for the Preservation of Chinese Studies. This sense of urgent preservation effectively contributed to Deng Shi's and Huang Binhong's writing of the Fine Arts Series, and their active search, rescue and collation of ancient relics and paintings and calligraphy. But the duo and others did not stop there; the work of polishing and brushing up the dirt on traditional painting was also an important burden on their minds. The main manifestation of this would be the active engagement with Chinese historical writing, which, although a momentary academic atmosphere, was undeniably also a strong sense of mission and responsibility inspired by a sense of national heritage.

It is important to note that art history writing at this time began to completely eliminate and move away from the theoretical models of the North and South that had been developed in the late Ming dynasty, and with them came major structural designs such as the contrast between Chinese and Western art or the two-source theory. Another point is that the scope of research on art history would no longer be limited to a part of calligraphy and painting. Rather, engineering architecture, sculptural works, jinshi, folk crafts, temple walls, bells, pots, pottery and tiles, inkstones, ink and silk were all included in the study of art history. These trends were in line with the enthusiasm for building natural history museums and antique fairs that prevailed at that time. In the particular historical context of national competition for survival, the emergence of such acts was clearly an important way of fostering national pride and increasing national confidence.

3. The dilemma faced by nationalist and traditionalist in modern Chinese art history

3.1. The Relationship between Literati Painting Tradition and Folk Tradition

Most people focus on the contradiction between elegance and vulgarity to explain this contradiction. Their theory assumes that folk art culture is just a copy of court art and scholar-official art. After the middle of the Qing Dynasty, the popularity of "Mustard Garden Painting Notation" strengthened this impression among the public. Folk art and culture are indeed the faithful medium of various popular cultures, but in fact the charm of folk art goes beyond that. It usually reveals a straightforward, simple and unrestrained vitality of life, and the information and artistic interest it preserves will be longer, more supportive and powerful. The concept of color and modeling techniques in folk culture also inversely influenced literati painting and injected new vitality into literati painting. For example, the art of Wu Changshuo and Qi Baishi in modern times is a remarkable example. In the history of modern Chinese art, it is obviously an important achievement to explore and organize the folk art tradition. Notable examples are the rediscovery of folk paper-cutting art in northern Shaanxi, which dates back to at least the Tang Dynasty, Dunhuang murals and murals in Han tombs. On the contrary, the imagination, speculation and interpretation of the folk art tradition by many intellectuals also became the artistic taste of populism, and even once became a substitute for the literati painting tradition.

3.2. The relationship between Chinese and Western art

On this matter, nationalism puts forward the theory of the two sources of eastern and western art. Just as the Chinese scholars in the late Qing Dynasty began to reconstruct their own academic map in the world context after jumping out of the dispute between classics and ancient literature, modern Chinese painting has also made changes, jumping out of the warning of the Haixi method and the brush and ink method, and instead standing in a broader world art background to discuss the problems of Chinese tradition and development. The populists play an active role in promoting the argument that there are two sources of eastern and western art. The advantage of this argument is that it is no longer limited to the traditional situation of pen and ink to think about the good and bad of Chinese and

Western aesthetics. They were also dismissive when traditional literati painters tried to speculate on the Western illusion of recreating art with ink and brush. The theory of the two Sources of East and West art completely overcomes this kind of thinking mode and hopes to define the aesthetic traditions of different nations from the root. Obviously, this distinction not only defends the status and dignity of its own value system of plastic arts, but also provides a sufficient academic space for the dissemination of Western aesthetics in China. In the May 4th Movement, the populists inadvertently played the role of rejecting the vernacular and opposing conservatism, which is also the origin of Chinese people's criticism of nationalists. In the discussion about national character and national character triggered by the quintessence, the quintessence has been fiercely criticized and become a symbol of rigidity, tradition and exclusion. Recent research suggests that this criticism may be a misunderstanding of nationalism: while populism is often portrayed as an attempt to curb new thinking in Western learning, it was embraced in different ways in its early days, but they have one thing in common: some people were or have been active disseminators of Western learning.

4. The influence of nationalist consciousness on the consciousness of modern Chinese art history

Wu Changshuo, Qi Baishi, Huang Binhong, Pan Tianshou and other modern masters of Chinese painting were born out of the tradition of painting with stone. Of course, Huang Binhong not only summarized the history of literati painting, but also opened up new ideas for the rapid development of modern Chinese painting. Through the analysis of the actual influence of the nationalists on modern Chinese art history, it can be found that their most commendable contribution should be to promote the aesthetic tradition of traditional literati painting and promote the discussion and development of the spiritual value. The artist's heart, the method of brush and ink stone, the art of calligraphy and the method of writing are still the irreplaceable norms for the evaluation of traditional artists. For Huang Binhong, the interpretations and definitions of Chinese art history by some western scholars have not shaken his faith. On the contrary, in the framework of comparing Chinese and Western art, he and his peers had a deeper and clearer understanding of China's own artistic tradition.

What role and contribution did the populists play in China's early acceptance of Western learning? What significance does the consciousness of quintessence of Chinese culture have in shaping Chinese people's cultural concept and safeguarding the intrinsic value of traditional culture and traditional art? These are very worthy of in-depth analysis. The consciousness of quintessence of Chinese culture has played an important role in the continuation of the ideal of Chinese traditional literati painting, which is an indispensable part of Chinese traditional context. When the quintessence of Chinese culture, Chinese classics, and the concept of Chinese painting, we will immediately feel a nationalist painstakingly. In a society where national competition is at an all-time high, such voices are a sedative for many of the blind and the reckless. Therefore, for the consciousness of quintessence in modern art history, it can also be regarded as a dried specimen, but it can also be regarded as a "golden needle" to inherit the lifeblood of traditional art.

5. Conclusion

To this day, while Chinese scholars need to rely on the results of sinology in Western countries to reconstruct their own scholarly achievements, traditional Chinese painters have failed to encounter this dilemma. Although the masterpieces of the ancients have been widely circulated abroad, their cornerstone has not wavered. It was not the combination of Central Asian art, Japanese aesthetic art and Persian art that the West had imagined, nor was it a variant of Lang Shining and other schools. Rather, it is Chinese art that developed and matured during the Song and Yuan dynasties, a feat that also owes much to the masters of the Nationalist School and the traditionalists with a sense of nationalism.

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