

Opposite Sex of Seeing - Image of Woman in Art History

Hongjue Dai

*Department of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, Leicester, UK
Lemon.an24@live.com*

Abstract: *Some experts argue that a thriving matriarchal culture existed in China's early history. One major cause is evolution theory study, and the second is the use of female characters as images of mankind's mythic origins. Despite this, no matriarchal societies have been discovered in China's 5,000-year history. After all, it was man's genius who penned the history of human civilisation. As a result, this paper examines how the appearance of the female as a visual symbol has changed throughout the history of ancient art in both the East and the West and look at the changing identity of women from a gender perspective.*

Keywords: *Feminism, Male gaze, Female art*

1. Introduction

Gender inequalities have existed since the invention of words and have affected every aspect of life, including politics, economics, culture, thinking, and ethics. From the Yellow Emperor roughly 4,000 years ago, according to Chinese history. Patriarchy reigns supreme. As the second sex, females were pushed to the margins of society. In the Hsia Dynasty, the hereditary system was established rather than the patriarchal system (2070-1600 B.C.). Without a doubt, patriarchy ensures. Until the nineteenth century, women took part in gender revolutions and emerged on the historical stage as themselves. The Women's Equal Rights Movement had a variety of viewpoints, some of which were radical and others of which were conservative.

2. Patriarchy be Established

Art emerged following a period of economic progress, and it was first found in rites, myths, merit songs, and historical records. As a result, art tended to concentrate in the hands of the wealthy, and it became a political problem in antiquity.

Because early humans were less productive, they needed to combine their resources to defend themselves from natural disasters, which gave rise to the concept of communities. On the one hand, females were primarily responsible for gathering fruits and sewing clothes, which provided a more consistent harvest and greater contribution to the community than males' fishing and hunting, and on the other hand, due to the tribe's lack of population and the importance of female fertility in expanding the tribe's size, females had an unusually high status at the time. - The Mother Goddess's cult is one of the oldest in the world.

However, as men came to understand their indispensable role in the parenting process, and the fact that an adult male created far more value in farming than an adult female, a patriarchal system was established, followed by a later hereditary system. For a long time, the patriarchy ruled the world. However, in today's world, it is not in line with contemporary values of equality. Since the 1970s, the topic of feminist art has gotten a lot of attention. There are many diverse findings concerning the emergence and evolution of feminism from many fields' experts, but the consistent nucleus is the pursuit of freedom and equality by feminists. There is no definitive definition of feminist art, but this does not affect our ability to think about classical painting from a feminine perspective.

3. Female Artists and Female

Only a few female artists existed throughout both Western and Eastern antiquity, from the founding

of a patriarchal culture to the recording of painters. Many female artists in ancient China were subordinate to their husbands, and even when they were documented, they were referred to as Mrs X, and their identity was portrayed as a family bond with her male relatives. Mrs. Zhao, for example, was the first woman recorded during the Three Kingdoms period. She was Sun Quan's (Emperor of Wu) Imperial concubine and the prime minister's sister, but there was no record of her full name. (Zhang, cite in 1973) [1] Guan Dao Sheng, who was famous until the Song period (960-1279 A.D.), had some effect. However, she was unfamiliar with following generations, although her husband, Zhao Meng Fu, was well-known. The study of Chinese art history was founded on male-based research, specifically, men's art history from the Central Plains. We've read art history that revolved around such a point. As a result, the length of women's art stated was extremely short, as were the time of female artists included.

In China, there is a proverb that "no talent is a virtue." When a woman was stared at, she materialised as a sight. Even though they were different from the independent opinions of ordinary women, female artists could not enter the eyes of male historians who wrote history. Many great female artists disappeared in the long river of history because men were the ones who defined the term "exceptional." Aside from that, women's education conditions were different at the time. There are conditions for aristocratic women to acquire a good education, but the entire education system was designed to materialise, enslave, and weaken women. Thence, most of the women were relatively narrow-minded, and painting just was a tool, the six arts, to fascinate men. (The six arts - in ancient China meant: rites, music, archery, charioteering, reading and writing, and arithmetic.)

With the potential effect of ancient culture, there is a tremendous disparity between women's and men's performance. Men's allure stems from their inherent qualities, such as talent, wit, experience, and even riches. Women's interest, on the other hand, is more akin to a mirror, in which they exhibit themselves in order to receive feedback and then evaluate themselves in light of the input and in line with men's expectations of women. They separate themselves into two categories, "a spectator" and "a performer," continually observing, watching, and then transforming themselves into a "sight" for men to observe - an extreme special vision object (Berger, 2008) [2]. Men will interpret a woman's behaviour, regardless of its aim or goal, as a suggestion on how to treat her. Women use this delicate self-examination to focus on their looks, behaviour, and dress in order to develop the temperament that they want men to have. At this moment a question arises, is this gaze free?

4. Seeing in Western Ancient Paintings

Visual representation does not presuppose a neutral audience; rather, it assumes that the spectator is always of a specific gender, class, race, and age. The concept of seeing must be gendered in order to be interpreted from a feminist perspective. We will analyse and ask questions confronting gender through the representation of the feminine person in the 'seeing' (Berger, 2008) of ancient paintings from East and West.

In classical painting, females had to keep their naked bodies pure, so in the Middle Ages females were portrayed in a more conservative manner, with naked females looking ashamed and showing their submission to men. After the Renaissance, a large number of nude girls began to appear, drawing on mythological characters and allowing artists to paint nude girls from private collections. In them, women are often shown with shy expressions, seductive gestures, in pursuit of a sensual thrill, with the aim of showing them in their own submission and flaunting their own wealth in public displays.

In Lorenzo Lotto's *Venus and Cupid*, Venus' pose is seductive, yet elegant, gentle, delicate and realistic, with her hands caressing her bound breasts; Cupid squeezes his own genitals and looks at Venus with pleasure. Venus and Cupid are often shown together in classical paintings. Cupid, the youngest child of Venus, always in the position of peering at or even touching his mother's feminine features. This oedipal and sensual pose is intended to arouse male sexual desire but must also show her own innocence.

For another, the *Venus of Urbino*, painted by the more famous artist Titian for the newlywed Duke of Urbino to hang in the bridal bedroom, is modelled by a famous prostitute, her eyes cast out to meet those of the viewer, teasingly awaiting their arrival. The right hand of Venus is stretched out freely, breaking the oval-shaped seal that confines her body, and she lies freely and comfortably in a daily environment that is not only divine but also erotic.

5. Seeing in Chinese Ancient Paintings

Belle painting, as a unique category of art depicting females in ancient China, was primarily used to 'educate and to help promote human decency. (Zhang, cite in 1973) Most are painted by male painters, representing male aesthetics and secular requirements, and subliminally weakening and subjugating femininity.

Belle painting has varied in style from the 'elegantly slender and rigorously simple' style of the Sixth Dynasty (222-589) to the more recent belle painting. Early belle painting was mainly about women in the court, but the field was slowly expanded. Unlike the subtleties of the West, there are few nude portraits in Chinese painting, but the idea of 'male superiority and female inferiority' is still evident.

Metaphysics emerged in the Wei and Jin dynasties (265—420A. D.), with a focus on spirituality. The visual image of the female gender was plain and elegant, reflecting the aesthetic preferences of scholars.

As the Tang dynasty (618 - 907 A.D.) became more liberal and many aristocratic court ladies were dissatisfied with the idea of 'male superiority and female inferiority', some female politicians emerged, and even the female empress Wu Zetian, some painters began to depict female beauty in a feminine angle, using heavy make-up to show the unique beauty of the female gender and, in a change from the previous style, began to depict raised breasts. (Li, 2013) [3] Zhang Xuan is one of the most famous belle painting painters of the Tang dynasty, and his P "Court Ladies Preparing Newly Woven Silk" illustrates the atmosphere of the period.

Depicting the scene of the court women working in the palace, showing the serious concentration of women during the practice, the costumes were gorgeous, the face was full and vivid, pay attention to the depiction of spirit and temperament, the dynamic depiction was accurate. It was realistic, the overall colour not only was simple and dignified but also was vivid. Up to now, these few paintings of the Tang Dynasty's ladies proved the higher social status of the women and the open and inclusive cultural environment in the Tang Dynasty.

During the Ming (1368-1644 A.D.) and Qing (1616-1911 A.D.) Dynasties, belle painting reached a mature stage, from the figurative form of the Song dynasty to the more romantic Ming dynasty, when the women's bodies were graceful and well-proportioned, their faces dignified and elegant, and their movements exuding the beauty of femininity and tranquillity. In particular, they were comfortable in their pavilions and wore tightly fitted Ming costumes, which enhanced their long and elegant physique.

Without any doubt, it is the new requirements of women in appearance and behaviour. There was a saying in the folks about the beauty of the Ming and Qing Dynasties: "Bi ru xuan dan, Mian ru Gua zi, Chun ru Ying tao, man zou bu yang shou, xiao bu zhang kou." [The nose like a gallbladder; the face like a melon seed; the lip is a cherry; walking slowly and don't let her hands up; laughing without open her mouth]. The first half of the sentence is a request for beautiful women's appearance—thin and delicate. The latter part of the sentence is the gesture of the beauty—weak and bound. In addition, in the ladies paintings, the requirements for costumes and hairstyles can be clearly seen. Women's clothes were elegant, and they used light gauze to show women's gentle and fresh. The hairpins were mainly phoenix-ban, cicada-ban, and Falling-horse-ban so that showing women's romantic, weak and unsupportive temperament and the body is delicate and the posture is graceful.

However, this change is not a positive phenomenon. There was a trend that an artist describe himself as a woman. For instance, Tang Ying's "Qiu Feng Zhi Shan Tu" [A lady holding a fan in autumn] was based on "Described himself as a woman", and the inscribed "Qiu Lai Zhi Shan He Shou Cang, He Shi Jia Ren Zhong Gan Shang. Qing Ba Shi Qing Xiang Xi Kan, Da Dou Shei Bu Zu Yan Liang [When the autumn is coming, the silk fan can be put away, and the sentimental woman is unpleasure. Please be clear about the world, and everyone is chasing the heat like this]. The female portraits recognized by the society at that time was sad and miserable. In this way, to express his weakness, loneliness, mourn and helpless. This kind of sorrow of "Described himself as a woman" clearly shows the status of women, and female must be attached to men as a dodder to gain happiness and joy. In words, "elegance", "fragility" and "Sadness" were the keywords of lady's paintings that time.

In the last Chinese feudal dynasty—the Qing Dynasty (1616-1911 A.D.), the ladies painting was more popular. At this time, the "sick beauty" style of female paintings reached its peak, and the female visual image was always weak, "yi feng jiao wu li" [relying on the wind and weak]. The portraits which painted by these male painters represented the aesthetic of men and secular requirements.

6. Conclusion

In the exploration of female identity, it will be found that although there are huge differences in cultural background, expressions, materials and styles between Chinese and Western ancient art, there is a clear tendency to materialize women. Female simply catered for male who constructed the historical images. In the seeing of female and female artists, pay attention to and turn over women's survival, rights and other issues, get rid of other-control, refuse to "materialize" and from "other-seeing" to "self-seeing". Then understanding women from the perspective of women themselves. Return women's attention from society and family to individuals. In this context we should consider what we can do for women artists and how we can build a new art history that includes various marginalised groups?

Looking at the past of women lived, we know where the meaning and value of feminist art is.

References

- [1] Zhang, Y., 1973. *Some T'ang and Pre T'ang Texts on Chinese Paintings: Chinese painters from earliest times till T'ang*.
- [2] Berger, J., 2008. *Ways of seeing*. Penguin UK.
- [3] Li, J., 2013. *The Case of the Convex Breasts of Tang Dynasty Ladies*. Shaanxi Education (Gaojiao) 9.
- [4] Acker, W.R.B., 1954. *Some T'ang and Pre-t'ang Texts on Chinese Painting*. Brill Archive.
- [5] Chang, K., 2009. *ART MYTH AND RITUAL P*. Harvard University Press.
- [6] Cun, F., 1996. *The Influence of the Early Gradual Development of Theory on Women in the Yuan Dynasty*. *Journal of the Peugeot Teachers' University 1*.
- [7] *The Changing Image of Ladies in Ancient Chinese Paintings*, 2016. . *The Changing Image of Ladies in Ancient Chinese Paintings 6*, 14–15.
- [8] Wang, Z., 2009. *The Art History of Chinese Ladies' Painting*. Nanjing: Southeast University Press.
- [9] Wu, J., 2015. *An Analysis of the Painting of Ladies by Zhang Xuan in the Tang Dynasty and Tang Yin in the Ming Dynasty*. Qingdao University of Science and Technology.
- [10] Yang, Y., 2011. *A Study of the Comparison between Tang Yin's Lady Paintings and Tang Dynasty Lady Paintings*. Jiangsu: Suzhou University.
- [11] Zhang, R., 2005. *A Brief Discussion of the Social Status of Women in the Song Dynasty*. *Journal of the Western Academy of Education 1*.
- [12] Zhao, L., 2013. *The Cultural Connotations of Ming and Qing Dynasty Ladies' Paintings*. *Journal of Science and Education - Electronic Edition 12*.
- [13] Zhu, J., 2010. *Painting by Ladies of the Tang Dynasty*. Jilin: Jilin History Press.