

# Generation and Transformation: A Study of China Traditional Painting under the Spread of Western Learning to the East

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**Abstract:** China traditional painting is an integral part of China traditional culture and has a long history. With the outbreak of the Opium War, the door of China was opened, and various foreign cultures were gradually combined with their own cultural heritage, and western paintings gradually appeared on the stage of art history. China is a traditional China art region with distinctive features. In addition, the emergence of the spread of western learning to the east and various schools of painters have produced a lot of innovations and influences on the traditional painting art in China. This paper will discuss the influence of the introduction of western learning to China's traditional painting art, so as to understand the introduction of western painting to China and its far-reaching influence on China's traditional painting art.

**Keywords:** Western learning spreading to the east; China; Traditional painting; Affect

## 1. Introduction

The spread of western learning to the east can be divided into two main development periods, the first is in the Ming Dynasty and the early Qing Dynasty, followed by the era of transformation, that is, since the late Qing Dynasty (or "modern times"). In the true sense, "the spread of Western learning to the East" is what Rong Hong said: "Instilling western learning in China has made China increasingly prosperous and civilized." "borrow Western civilization Learning to improve the culture of the East will surely transform this old empire into a young new China. "[1]

The spread of western learning to the east refers to the historical development process in which western academic thoughts were gradually introduced to China from the late Ming Dynasty to modern times in China. As a historical phenomenon, the spread of western learning to the east has had a great influence in the modern history of China. China's traditional painting, represented by Chinese traditional art, is gradually merging under the impact of western civilization. It is this spreading of Chinese and Western painting art that has had a great influence on the development of traditional painting art in China.

The development process of "Western painting spreading to the east" refers to the development process of cross-blending between eastern and western cultures, and this cultural blending is the general trend of artistic development. The influx of western paintings into China not only enriched the content of Chinese traditional painting art, but also promoted the expression of western paintings, which greatly promoted the development of traditional painting in China. In the whole modern history of China, by connecting the characteristics of western art in different historical backgrounds at that time and the important role of western painting in the historical trend of Chinese painting, people can have a deeper understanding of the traditional painting culture of the Chinese nation, thus improving their confidence in the Chinese nation. The spread of western painting to the east has enabled Chinese painting to achieve the integration of Chinese and western art by taking the essence of western art, thus forming a trend of innovation to modernity, which has greatly changed the western art and cultural circles.

## 2. The characteristics and development of China traditional painting

The artistic creation of Chinese traditional painting and its cultural connotation combine the cultural knowledge and aesthetic taste of the Chinese nation, which embodies the Chinese nation's understanding of nature, social relations and related fields such as politics, morality and literature. [2]

Traditional Chinese painting pays attention to "the external teacher's mental source, and the Chinese get the mental source", which is characterized by "putting the pen before the intention, and painting with the best intention", pays attention to the combination of people and scenery, and pursues the artistic conception of drawing the spirit with form, combining form and spirit, and expressing the spirit with charm. Inheritance is for further development, and the foundation of innovation is to inherit the precious experience of our ancestors. Of course, the inheritance of China's traditional painting is not a careless inheritance, but a selective inheritance, and it must conform to the development of the times. Therefore, Manager Li concluded: "The study of contemporary artists should not only start from the traditional art and form of China, but also follow the modern development with the traditional art theory of China and integrate their own aesthetic requirements. Only in this way can innovation be carried out.

### **3. Acceptance of Western painting spreading to the east**

In the middle and late Ming Dynasty, with a large number of foreign paintings continuously entering our country, China people gradually realized the advanced nature of western science and technology in their communication and contact with the world, and took great interest in it. At that time, most of the missionaries had rich scientific knowledge and technology in astronomy, calendar, mathematics, architecture and so on, which played a decisive role in promoting the art of western painting. At the same time, the rulers of Ming and Qing dynasties also regarded western art with special respect, which made missionaries gradually gain a position in the court. But in fact, the influence of western art in Ming and Qing dynasties was not limited to the palace. Dai Yi, a scholar, pointed out in *A Concise History of Qing Dynasty* that western art "only blooms in the palace walls" after it came to China, but this is a wrong view. In fact, the important role of western art in China folk painting has been widely accepted by the society, and it has been reflected in folk prints, glass paintings, ceramic paintings, export paintings and other works of art in the Ming and Qing Dynasties.

During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the development zones of western art and western art in China were mainly located in the rural areas of Guangzhou, Nanjing, Shanghai and Beijing. In this kind of folk life, they also had extensive understanding and in-depth contact with western art. The development of industry in Ming and Qing dynasties also promoted the artistic development of the civilian class, which increased the demand for folk art. As a new art collection group, salt merchants and loan sharks, who are newly developed in the coastal cities of China and the south of the Yangtze River, are more likely to accept fresh and exquisite western-style paintings because they show civilian aesthetic taste without too many strict traditional evaluation criteria. Under his guidance, the painting of western calendar style quickly formed a trend.

From the Ming and Qing editions of *The Whole Picture of the West Chamber* and *The Picture of jathyapple in Mid-Autumn Festival at Puji Bridge in Shantang*, everyone may see the inscriptions such as "Imitating Taixi's brushwork" and "Imitating Taixi's brushwork", which shows that painting with western style has formed a trend for people to follow suit. The frequent exchanges and communication between the East and the West have further promoted the vigorous development of the folk western style in China. <sup>[3]</sup>During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the influence of western calendar paintings on Chinese folk art was quite broad, starting from the southern coastal county and extending to many towns in the north; The duration is also very long. In the monthly brand New Year pictures that rose in the middle of the 20th century, we can also find the source of western painting factors in the Ming and Qing Dynasties.

### **4. There are three paths for the introduction of western learning and western painting:**

#### ***4.1. The spread of western paintings***

The spread of western paintings, mainly missionaries, was active in the 16th and 18th centuries, which also had a considerable impact on the imperial court and folk painting art in China. At that time, missionaries were the most important way for China to promote the communication between Chinese and Western civilizations. The communication between Chinese and Western civilizations took place at an early stage, and the most important reason was that it was guided by missionaries. As early as the sixteenth century, missionaries began to preach in China, and missionaries also introduced foreign works by means of missionary preaching. During the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, the process of western painting spreading eastward occurred, but at that time, western civilization was still in a relatively vigorous dissemination stage. The western painting art created by missionaries in the earlier stage had a relatively small impact on Chinese traditional painting, and most of them were confined to the imperial

court in China, which was not understood by Chinese people. However, the introduction of western painting art by missionaries in China is only the beginning. The appearance of missionaries in China broadens the horizons of Chinese people, and at the same time expands the spread field of their own culture and art. What has attracted people's attention is that foreign missionaries have stepped into our land, and all previous dynasties in China have kindly respected them and given them full rights to preach. On the one hand, it not only shows the great power of the Chinese nation, but also promotes the interactive exchanges between Chinese and Western civilizations. However, the cultural policies of Chinese emperors towards missionaries have not been neglected. The culture and art spread by China missionaries in China have been treated with courtesy, and foreign missionaries have also come to China to preach and left some civilized knowledge and cultural and artistic works, which is also the beginning of China's western painting spreading to the east.

#### ***4.2. The role of overseas students***

The introduction of missionaries into China is a passive process of contacting foreign civilization and art, and missionaries are the main pioneers who spread western painting art to China. At a specific stage in the modern development history of China, a large number of Chinese overseas students studied abroad and learned about foreign civilizations and arts. At that time, the first batch of Chinese students studying abroad constantly reflected the differences between their own countries and foreign civilizations and arts. In order to promote the rapid development of the Chinese nation, Chinese overseas students are striving to innovate and reform through their own strength. Their strength objectively promotes the development of China's modernization and has a certain positive impact on the mutual integration of eastern and western civilizations. It is an important historical task for Chinese overseas students at a specific stage, and it also provides an important bridge for the exchange of Chinese and western history and culture, thus promoting the continuous deepening of the spread of Western learning to the East.<sup>[4]</sup>

Chinese overseas students have used their own experience to learn, and introduced the ideas of traditional culture and art, as well as their own knowledge. The spread of western paintings in China to the east is an important part of the spread of western learning to the east, and Chinese traditional art has also developed further from this historical stage. Chinese traditional painting often meets western painting, and this stage is also an important stage for reference and development. The famous painter Xu Beihong's paintings also draw a lot of foreign culture and art, which is closely related to the influence of overseas students in China. Some Chinese students have a deep understanding of western art and profound attainments in western painting.

#### ***4.3. The promotion of educational institutions***

Due to the outbreak of the Opium War, China had to open a trading port. After opening to the outside world, the trade ports have further spread the advanced western culture and technology to China. A large number of China students have returned from overseas to spread what they have learned in their own country. The establishment of churches by church personnel and the establishment of specific studio schools by relevant forces at home and abroad also promoted the introduction of western-style paintings in China. Especially in the construction of educational departments, the first is the emerging painting school, and most of these schools are in trading ports, which are generally organized by intellectuals and church personnel at home and abroad, such as the China Academy of Painting and Fine Arts established in Shanghai. School-running institutions trained a group of early painting educators in China, which promoted the vigorous development of western painting in China, greatly promoted the pace of western painting spreading to the east, and laid a solid foundation for the cultivation of western painting artists and the inheritance and development of technology in China in the later period. In addition, pictorial magazine has promoted the vigorous development of western painting. With the popularization of newspapers in China in modern times, the pictorial cause of promoting western paintings has also been developed. The popularity of pictorial has further promoted the popularization of western painting in China. With the help of pictorial media, the ordinary people in China have more quickly understood the characteristics of western painting, especially western painting. After this spread, people at home and abroad have paid extensive attention to western painting and Chinese traditional painting. The education of folk painting in China has also been deeply influenced by western painting and greatly enriched the traditional painting art in China.

## **5. The influence of the introduction of western painting on China traditional painting**

The blending of Chinese traditional painting and western painting art was carried out under the historical background of the invasion of China by western European powers at that time. At that time, local civilization was impacted to a certain extent, and western civilization also promoted the modernization of China civilization. Chinese traditional painting is the crystallization of Chinese civilization with a history of nearly a thousand years. However, with the evolution of history, western art is gradually leading the trend of artistic painting. Recognizing the impact of the introduction of western painting on China, we must also improve our cultural self-confidence and attach importance to and preserve the artistic culture of the Chinese nation.<sup>[5]</sup>

### ***5.1. Enriched the art form of China***

The introduction of all foreign cultures will have some influence on China's local culture, and the most important influence is to enrich the artistic content of our local culture. In the process of western painting spreading to the east, the introduction of western painting also enriched our fine arts category. Although there are many schools of traditional painting in China, China's traditional freehand brushwork is the main one. However, the tradition of literati painting is a prominent representative in Chinese traditional art, and the realm emphasized by Chinese traditional painting often exists among literati and gentlemen, and most of the objects depicted are landscapes and flowers. All these are the inevitable products of China's special historical environment, which embodies the rich feelings of literati and deviates from the realism of real life. The introduction of western painting is just different from the original Chinese painting. The western painting led by realism has opened up a brand-new stage for the development of Chinese painting. Realism or freehand brushwork, due to the blending and collision of Chinese and western cultures, the bud of western painting blossomed in Chinese painting, which cultivated people's aesthetic interest in historical development. In the past, Chinese people's aesthetic methods of traditional painting art were monotonous, but after the introduction of western painting, Chinese people's original aesthetic methods were gradually impacted, which enriched the traditional aesthetic form of China and made Chinese people's aesthetic view of traditional painting art no longer monotonous.

### ***5.2. Promote the reform of China's art***

In the past, Chinese paintings were expressed in personal spiritual realm, which was seriously divorced from reality, and did not play much role and significance in China's social transformation and historical development. However, western painting is also a changing process rooted in the historical conditions of China, which reflects the historical stages of China and shows special historical figures and heroes. However, after China people absorbed western paintings, especially at the specific stage of China's history, intellectuals picked up brushes to express their concern for the fate of mankind and their hatred for the invasion of foreign powers at the time of national disaster. According to the characteristics of western painting, domestic artists in China added western painting to the blood of Chinese painting, making it serve the social transformation. For example, "Yu Gong Yi Shan" is such a realistic painting full of patriotism, which shows the belief and spirit of our national people who are not afraid of hardships and persistently fight for the invaders to the end. The change of art is reflected in the emergence of many new realistic arts, while other artistic techniques have also changed. For example, attaching importance to the educational significance of sketching, especially to the cultivation of painting sketching in art education activities, has also provided a positive role in promoting the reform and development of Chinese painting. In addition, some China art painters who came back from abroad actively introduced the expression of western painting into the production of Chinese painting after exploring western painting, and paid more and more attention to the application of color theory and perspective method in China traditional painting.

### ***5.3. Enhance self-confidence in national art***

Although foreign culture has had a positive impact on the development of China's local culture. However, we must also see the influence of foreign culture and the damage to China's traditional national culture. If we blindly follow western art and forget the characteristics of our traditional painting, we will ignore the development of China's local traditional painting, which will make China's culture and art more and more out of human sight. A national culture without its own cultural and spiritual foundation is extremely terrible, and without the local cultural and spiritual connotation, it is equivalent to having

no national cultural spirit, which is unfavorable to the future development of the Chinese nation. The spirit of the Chinese nation is also of guiding significance. Although the introduction of western paintings into China has gradually occupied a certain historical position, it is still very crucial to protect our own Chinese painting and its significance of Chinese national spirit. Because the more western painting continues to flow into China, the more it needs to improve the national pride of Chinese painting. In this process, we should not only learn from the outstanding achievements of foreign art, but also maintain our own characteristics. We should not simply praise the advantages of western painting, but also see its shortcomings. To improve people's confidence in the art of Chinese painting, we must have a fuller understanding of Chinese painting. Only in this way can we maintain our characteristics under the influence of western painting. But in a word, the whole process of western learning spreading to the east is also the whole process of learning from each other's strong points, and the development of China's fine arts must be continuously infused with new vitality. Therefore, the development of China's fine arts does not depend entirely on western paintings, but more on respecting them, so as to realize the thinking content and practical methods of "takenism".

Since ancient times, there has been a harmonious relationship between eastern and western civilizations. People all know that there was a Silk Road in the Han and Tang Dynasties, a maritime trade in the Song Dynasty and the emergence and development of the four great inventions, Zheng He's seven voyages to the West in the Ming Dynasty, and so on, all of which went from Chinese civilization to the west when western civilization flowed into China. China civilization also interacted with western civilization and faced the world at the same time.<sup>[6]</sup>

Under the historical background of domestic troubles and foreign invasion in modern China, the trend of saving the country with western learning has been radical, which has turned the trend of modern painting innovation in China into a blend of Chinese and western, and the spread of western painting to the east also contains the trend of Chinese painting art to the west. With the conscious intake of western painters and the introduction of Chinese artists, the ideas and methods of western painters have been integrated, and new brushwork has been further explored on the basis of realism. Chinese figure meticulous painting has been integrated into the color changes of Chinese ink and wash on the basis of western art realism, which is a unique artistic feature of our country. The new forms of works entering the West mainly include Chinese painting, ink painting, printmaking, etc., and they are mostly manifested in their application fields such as art, aesthetic theory and philosophical research. The enthusiasm of Chinese artists and the rational intake of Western artists have integrated Chinese and Western aesthetic theories and formed a model of innovation and creation. The art of Chinese painting and the essence of western modern aesthetics complement each other, prompting Chinese artists to carry out new development of Chinese painting modernization on the basis.<sup>[7]</sup>

Each national culture has its own unique cultural characteristics, and the exchange and integration with traditional Chinese culture is a very complicated process. In the process of integration, we must choose excellent technical elements to give full play to the characteristics, and we can't abandon the essence and accept the external quality completely, because this will make people lose their national cultural and artistic characteristics, thus failing to achieve the effect of artistic reform and innovation. While choosing to blend, we should also have a pair of eyes to explore and appreciate the beauty, a mind to tolerate foreign excellent characteristics and a mind to dare to choose, so that China art under the innovative spirit can achieve almost perfect results, and at the same time, Chinese and Western cultures should communicate and learn from each other. Under the general situation of world economic integration, the best choice for artistic transformation and innovation is better cultural integration, and the vigorous development of art and Chinese painting should stick to the cornerstone of international modernity. Pursuing the structure of local discourse, maintaining the source of our own socialist civilization, and taking the unique artistic spirit as the leading factor. Integrate with global civilization.

## 6. Conclusion

The spread of western painting to the east is a process of mutual exchange and integration between eastern and western cultures. In this process, the introduction of western painting about the historical evolution of the development of traditional Chinese painting is also indispensable. The course of artistic evolution is also the course of mutual communication and learning among various civilizations in the world. Nowadays, exchanges between countries are becoming more frequent and social transformation is intensifying. At the same time, the influence of foreign society is constantly increasing. How to maintain our own advantages and absorb foreign experience is worthy of people's serious thinking and trying. The cultural development of western painting spreading to the east is also the basic condition for

the development of human civilization, and it should be treated fairly in this process. Traditional painting is the crystallization of human culture, and the transcendence of art cannot be separated from the transcendence of people's culture. Therefore, both eastern and western art have their own advantages, and they have different styles in different historical backgrounds, local characteristics, ethnic minority art and religious art, and there are also differences in expression forms and artistic values. However, these arts have their own expression of the same ideas. These elements can communicate with each other, change the old art form and social state, and produce a new art civilization. The spread of western painting to the east not only makes our traditional painting innovative and displayed in international art forums, but also makes our country and the west, our modern and ancient art understand and blend with each other, making the theory of Chinese painting transition from ancient form to modern form.

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