Multiple expression forms and their aesthetic trend of modern Chinese image oil painting

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Abstract: As an integral component of Chinese traditional painting theory, the image bears distinct characteristics that resonate with various aesthetic emotions such as Chinese traditional culture, philosophical thought, and artistic spirit. Image oil painting, a painting style imbued with Chinese local flavors, emerged from the early oil painters' pursuit of "integration of Chinese and Western" techniques. Its inner core is rooted in Chinese painting, emphasizing a profound spiritual union between the subject's mind and the object. It underscores the fusion of artistic conceptions and adheres to the imagery principle of "being inspired by nature externally, while drawing from the heart internally." The intuitive aesthetic sensation it evokes is that of "vivid charm." Contemporary image oil painting stands as one of the most representative styles of "nationalization" and "localization" in global art, and it also holds significant influence worldwide. This paper takes Chinese modern image oil painting as its starting point, delving into the spirit of traditional Chinese imagery. It explores the blend and evolution of Chinese modern image oil painting with contemporary imagery, and further examines its aesthetic characteristics. By doing so, it aims to elucidate the spiritual traits and aesthetic tendencies of Chinese modern image oil painting, highlighting its unique aesthetic significance and esteemed academic standing, both in China and the global art and aesthetics community.

Keywords: Chinese contemporary image oil painting; aesthetic implication; diversified aesthetic appreciation

1. Introduction

Currently, as our country's strength grows, so does its cultural revitalization and emphasis on independent innovation, gradually forming the vanguard of our nation. Amidst this developmental flowering, in the realm of oil painting, a new wave of "local" or "indigenous" painting has emerged, rich in national and regional artistic styles. Among these, the "imagery" art style stands out as one of the most intense expressions of traditional Chinese aesthetics. Image painting, as a novel artistic expression, has become a venue that domestic oil painters are eager to explore. On one hand, they actively absorb elements from Western classical painting; on the other, they strive to recognize and construct from the perspective of Chinese traditional "brushwork" aesthetics. "The essence of freehand brushwork lies in expressing the spirit of things in the most concise manner, pursuing rigor and order in meaning, directly grasping the essence of things, and expressing inner feelings." Hence, China's image oil painting can exhibit a nation's tolerance for diverse artistic and cultural expressions^[1].

The traditional Chinese aesthetic concept of "freehand brushwork" has sprouted from China's unique thinking characteristics, presenting an aesthetic orientation that "emphasizes representation" and "symbolism." This is closely linked to the historical background and aesthetic mentality in which it originated. Within the environment of Chinese traditional freehand brushwork aesthetics, harmony of thought and richness of content have always been advocated in Chinese painting. However, under the influence of Taoist philosophy, scholar-officials have paid greater attention to expressing inner thoughts, emphasizing the formation of spirit and essence over mere "writing" or representation. This gives rise to the Chinese classical painting's aesthetic concept of "freehand brushwork."

2. The aesthetic expression in the contemporary image oil painting works

2.1 Writing shape and beautiful visual shape

2.1.1 The "writing" pen with the book included in the painting

Writing with a brush, in the context of Chinese painting, is a formal language. This so-called "writing" refers to shaping objects with brush strokes, emulating the power and dynamism of calligraphy. Modern Chinese image oil painting adheres to the traditional aesthetic viewpoint of "the words and the painting share the same root" and emphasizes the movement and dynamic charm of brush and ink. As Mr. Daishi once said, "Painting does not always say 'painting'; the written word does not always say 'writing.' There are times and places where they intersect." The calligraphy style is a prominent feature of traditional Chinese art, presenting an aesthetic form with a unique artistic conception and reflecting the artist's inner world.

Yan Ping, a modern Chinese female artist, exhibits a strong freehand brushwork style in her paintings and is skilled in the technique of "writing." She pays great attention to the orientation and positioning of the brush. Her brushstrokes are both skilled and flexible, vigorous yet changeable, fast and rhythmic, imparting an elegant and smooth flow to her entire composition. Her works, through the medium of "writing," demonstrate her effortless command of the brush. In Yan Ping's oil paintings, every line and stroke are her lifeblood. These few simple strokes, in fact, represent the tireless dedication and intense life experiences she has undergone during the creative process, exhibiting a bold and unrestrained freehand style^[2].

In her film "Mother and Son" (see Figure 1), Yan Ping draws upon her personal feelings as a mother to evoke awe for motherhood among viewers. Yan Ping believes that this simple brushwork imparts a strong visual impact, enabling a spiritual connection to form between the viewer and the artist. Her creative ideas align perfectly with the "writing" methodology in Chinese painting, which is concise, vivid, prominent, and presents a clever and somewhat abstract image. She creates a traditional Chinese aesthetic, a world that is both clever and visually dynamic. Simultaneously, in her portrayal of the characters, Yan Ping employs variable brush strokes to depict the figures in the painting, revealing their soft, rigid, static, and dynamic appearances. She perfectly captures the tender expressions of the mother and the infant, symbolizing the mother's strength and devotion to her child.



Figure 1: Yan Ping, Mother and Son, 2002

Wang Minan, a critic from Tsinghua University, once said, "The most touching part of Yan Ping's works is that his body movements are constantly changing. Yan Ping's All A Brave Heart (see Figure 2) uses artistic body movements to express his emotions. In the center of the painting, there is a female good was placed in a complex room, the woman's body has a big distortion, she used the different direction, strength and speed of writing pen, the proportion of the figure and form outline the subjective exaggeration and stretching, which produced a very strong dynamic feeling, let a person have a kind of tension and passion of emotional feeling. In the picture, it is expressed with calligraphy and perceptual brushwork, containing "elegant brush grass", expressing the twists and turns and metaphors of the artist's mind^[3].



Figure 2: Yan Ping, All with a Brave Heart, 2014

2.1.2 "Simplified" shape form

Day is an outstanding modern image painter. He is skilled in incorporating brushwork line drawing into his oil paintings. He also cleverly references the traditional aesthetic expression of "simplification" with bold, straightforward strokes. His unique, vivid, and distinctive artistic style is a result of his two-dimensional representation of the structure and composition of objects.



Figure 3: Des and Li Fuyi 2002

Li Fuyi's (Figure 3) excellence lies in his ability to meticulously summarize and select the bodily features of characters while masterfully capturing their essence and soul. In his works, one can distinctly sense a balance between tension and relaxation. The intricate details, the interplay of bold and delicate strokes, and the facial rendering using the monochrome tile technique, with just a few dark lines, bring out the character's hair color. The mature brown shade expertly reveals the bone structure of the portrait, imparting a clear three-dimensional feel^[4].

In the background, he employs the simplicity of "white" to underscore the significance of the characters. In the ping yan in xing ping sketch, Dai's approach excludes excessive details and intricate imagery. He neither dwells on minor details nor utilizes an overabundance of lines or colors. Instead, he leaves ample room for the viewer's imagination.

Adopting the "simplified" technique, he highlights the primary-secondary relationship of images. The protagonist, "Yan," is rendered lifelike with smooth lines, while the secondary characters are summarized elegantly, leaving plenty of negative space. This enhances the image's streamlined and dynamic quality.

It is "intriguing," "moving," and "leaves more room for creativity and aesthetic imagination." This is Dai's pursuit of a visual form. Through subjective choices, he creates a unique "meaning." His brush points to places of interest, expressing ideas directly, namely, "action preceded by inspiration."

In this painting, whether it's the primary-secondary relationship, color processing, or brushwork, they all embody a concept of "small yet expansive." It's evident that Dai approaches this painting with

spontaneous brushwork. His creation process involves minimal premeditation and no self-imposed rules. He focuses on the improvisation that emerges from the ink, allowing himself to be inspired by what he sees and actively embracing new ideas, as shown in Figure 4. With the simplest of ink, he creates an artistic conception that matches his mood^[5].



Figure 4: DaShi and Yan Ping Sketching in Xingping 2008

2.1.3 Italian brush stroke shape

Zhao Wuji, a renowned Chinese oil painter, is renowned for his spontaneous brushwork style, presenting an artistic vision teeming with dynamism and flux. His works, rich in artistic form and aesthetic qualities, distill the essence of traditional Chinese freehand brushwork and philosophical schools while pertinently incorporating the aesthetic sensibilities of Western painting. This fusion showcases a harmonious blend of Chinese and Western aesthetic values and concepts, breaking new ground in artistic expression. The majority of the images he portrays stem from his own "eyes and mind," serving as expressions of his innermost sentiments. The "combination of static and dynamic" elements characterizes the compositional style of his works, achieving a remarkable aesthetic impact^[6].

In his paintings dated 19.10.2001 (see Figure 5), abstract morphological images and distinct patterns create an expansive realm for the free-flowing implications of his brush. The artist once stated, "I have never sketched, nor have I ever needed to." Thus, in Zhao Wuji's paintings, the brush strokes themselves embody a vibrant aesthetic. Through techniques such as layering, splattering, wiping, kneading, and sweeping, the artist expresses his own contrast between dryness and moisture, sprinkling with ingenuity. Each stroke is a testament to beauty. He is attentive to the interplay between brush form and the forms of things, seeking a harmonious fit. The form finds its basis in the image, while the image attains personalized expression. Between movement and reality, he senses boundless vitality. Under his deliberate hand, his works often feature chaotic, organic lines—sometimes drifting, sometimes rhythmic, sometimes vigorous and unconstrained by form. In the space between "likeness" and "unlikeness," he conveys the artist's mood of "virtual static ecstasy," embodying the unique Chinese philosophical state of "nature and humanity."



Figure 5: Zhao Wuji, 1910.2001,2001

2.2 Imagery, color, beauty and visual form

2.2.1 Black and white mysteries are empty and ethereal

The fundamental goal of color sense is to establish color order. Without color order, no matter how rich the colors may be, they can only make people dizzy and eventually result in a "chaotic visual experience." In modern Chinese "image" oil painting, many artists draw inspiration from the essence of literati painting, emphasizing the use and contrast of black and white, and creating numerous "ink" images that are closer to China, giving people a mysterious "Oriental" feeling. Among these artists, Wang Kun stands out as a typical oil painter^[7].

He refers to the traditional Chinese expression method of freehand brushwork and utilizes black and white to present a distinctive visual form of freehand brushwork. In Wang Kun's composition "Yak and Snow Mountains," (see Figure 6) the black and white structure of the painting resembles a freehand ink flower and bird painting from the Ming and Qing Dynasties. It takes the black yak as the central theme, forming a subtle contrast with the white snow mountain, reflecting the traditional Chinese color aesthetic, specifically the cultural symbols of "black" and "white."

Wang Kun employs methods such as black and white color contrast, block face comparison, and spatial contrast, allowing the work to blend ethereal and bold aesthetic elements, black and white, and virtual white. These elements intertwine, showcasing an extraordinary style and evoking a transcendent artistic conception.



Figure 6: Wang Kun, Plateau Soul Series, 1992

Wang Kun argued that although the materials of oil painting and ink painting are different, the two can be combined when created. In fact, the black oil color and the ink painting are different, because it itself is with the oil color as the carrier, so in a sense, it can also give people a deeper feeling. In this painting "Cattle Consumption" (as shown in Figure 7), the author uses both black and white colors to create a mysterious and illusory atmosphere, and presents a strong visual impact with both black and white colors. In terms of composition, "yak" is the main content, but the depiction of "body shape" is very weak. The author does not pay more attention to the depiction of "body shape", but pays more attention to the performance of "spirit". This kind of straightforward painting method has gone beyond the objective form of yak and reached its inner world, which is a kind of art consistent with the spirit of Chinese freehand brushwork^[8].

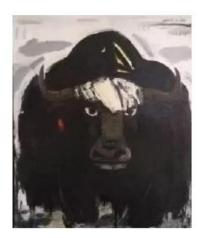


Figure 7: Wang Kun, Yak, 1992

2.2.2 Elegant and implicit low purity

Guo Lizhong, a master of image oil painting, stands out as an exceptional oil painter skilled in utilizing light colors to depict the forms of objects. He excels in discerning "taste," shunning excessive sensory stimulation and placing particular emphasis on his own spiritual emotions. Through the colors of his images, he expresses himself. As a result, his image oil paintings exhibit visual aesthetic qualities that are "positive, beautiful, pure, and simple."





Figure 8: Guo Lizhong, Image of Jiangnan, 2017,

Figure 9: Guo Lizhong, Image of Southern Anhui Series 2, 2016

For example, Guo Lizhong's Image of Jiangnan (see Figure 8) and Image of Southern Anhui Series II (see Figure 9), put all things in nature in a peaceful gray atmosphere, showing a "neutral" elegant color aesthetic taste. It can be seen that Guo Lizhong did not pay too much attention to the scientific expression of light and color in the expression of color in his painting. On the contrary, he paid more attention to observing the visual color effect of objects. He is good at replacing high purity and jumping color with an elegant, introverted and low purity gray tone, and making use of the subtle differences between colors to build a kind of ethereal, distant and distant feeling, and also shows the poetic Oriental artistic conception and elegant feelings contained in the works^[9].

2.2.3 Strong and strong and high purity

During this period, the characters represented by Yan Ping and Chen Junde are quite typical. Yan Ping's color expression in her image oil paintings is a blend of her reason and emotion. Her rational thoughts are expressed through emotion, while her emotional expressions are supported by rational thoughts. To some extent, Yan Ping's exploration of color language transcends her own constraints in rational thinking and exhibits distinct personal color aesthetic characteristics in her continuous exploration and creation of color language. Throughout Yan Ping's vibrant oil paintings, the expression of color takes center stage. Her use of color is bold, straightforward, and logical. She abandons the objective description of an object's color and focuses more on conveying her own emotions and beauty to the viewer. In a sense, her paintings align with the color concept of Western expressionism, exhibiting a strong contrast and a high degree of purity. For instance, her painting "Feeling the Setting Sun" (see Figure 10) showcases a simplistic beauty of color with its unique sense of hue. Yan Ping employs a plethora of high-saturation colors, such as vermilion and orange yellow, to overlap color blocks, thus creating a visual focal point. The overall tone of the painting is bright and fresh, with bold and confident brushstrokes. The rich and pure color style imbues a warm atmosphere. Simultaneously, the interplay between the cool and warm colors forms a striking contrast that not only feels harmonious but also elevates the color scheme of the entire composition^[10].

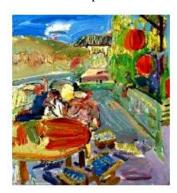


Figure 10: Yan Ping feeling the setting Yang 2004

The main artistic feature of Chen Junde's creation of vivid oil painting is "freehand lyric", especially in terms of color. He especially likes the painting spirit of Ba Dashan People's "borrowing things to write the heart", and also likes Shi Tao's painting art of "reality and reality", pursuing the harmony and unity of ink and objects in his works. Chen Junde's freehand brushwork pays attention to the expression of "meaning", and his pen is reasonable, clear and colorful, clear but not floating, light but not thick, and sentimental. Chen Junde's figurative oil paintings mostly use the main color and high purity color to form a unique form and color, showing a kind of diastolic rhythm. In the painting "Lemon Flowers" (see Figure 11), Chen Junde omitted the process of multiple color mixing, making the color on the picture have a relaxed, light, transparent feeling, with a high degree of purity. High-purity oil color squares are dotted in the painting, and the light blue and pink purple set each other off, and the yellow and green leaves make the painting look more three-dimensional, like a blooming flower. In the whole picture, the proportion of blue and purple accounted for three quarters of the picture, it and the front row of yellow lemon constitutes a complementary color, painter skillfully used the supplementary color and contrast color law, the subject in the form of still life beauty highlights, let the whole picture is concave and convex, color coordination, reveals the painter under the subjective romantic brushwork^[11].



Figure 11: Chen Junde "Lemon Flowers" 2007

2.3 Artistic conception pattern and beautiful visual form

2.3.1 The composition form of the ethereal implication

During the Five Dynasties, Jing Hao once stated in his Writing book: "View the scene, and then understand its shape." In any painting, regardless of the theme, color changes, or the object, if one cannot distinguish the subject and object, the painting will appear ordinary and vague. Only when the subject and objects coexist, and each element contrasts and changes between reality, density, aggregation, and dispersion, playing its own role, can the balance and harmony of the picture composition be ensured^[12].

In contemporary image oil painting, we observe that some painters excel in employing the spatial treatment method of traditional painting. Their works do not adhere strictly to the focal perspective of Western painting but rather prioritize the morphological composition of natural objects and the three-dimensional space in which they exist. In terms of picture creation, these artists not only retain Western spatial perspective characteristics but also emphasize inheriting the "far" and "near" changes in Chinese oil painting.

For instance, Ren Chuanwen's image oil paintings clearly reflect the traditional painting method of "with far but not with near" and seek a poetic Oriental painting style. In his work "Mirage" (as shown in Figure 12), the artist adopts a combination of broad and far perspectives, presenting a comprehensive picture through a blend of air and reality. In this painting, the foreground is left blank, and the objects are pushed far away by the expansive expression of the large picture, employing a wide and far composition method. The middle of the painting features a "real" outline, suggesting that this is not the limit of the line of sight. Behind the painting, there should be a wider world, which serves as an extension and a connection.

Ren Chuanwen utilizes atmospheric perspective, employing the atmosphere as a barrier to vision, and contrasts the light and shade in the distant mountains and sky. There are few objects in the

foreground, corresponding to the background of "flat" and "empty," while the subjects in the "real" correspond to the ground, background, and sky in the "virtual," allowing the audience to subconsciously connect them. This achieves a visual artistic effect that is both virtual and real, ethereal and clever.

Xu Li is an image oil painter who attaches great importance to the aesthetic expression of spatial artistic conception. He is a conscious practitioner of the combination of Chinese and Western art. His image oil paintings not only inherit the rules, layout, realm, and implication of traditional landscape painting but also possess the unique artistic aesthetic characteristics of Chinese literati painting.



Figure 12: Ren Chuanwen, A Mirage, 2006

Xu Li's "After the Snow" is a representative "three-paragraph" creation, with the main characters in front and the others in the back. This is a representative oil painting. In this painting, the texture of the snow mountain in close range is very obvious, leaving a large gap in the center, representing a kind of invisible space, while the distance is a very vivid mountain structure, which is a kind of composition handed down from ancient China. Between "similar and different", Xu Li uses an abstract ink and a broad landscape structure to express the spirit of Chinese freehand brushwork, whose core is "literary heart" and "poetry". He is heavy and overlapping, rigid and soft, thick and thin, natural and unrestrained calligraphy style, with the Chinese traditional strength and strength, with oil color as the carrier, the observation of the image, carried out a heterogeneous transformation, showing the aesthetic style and artistic conception of modern image oil painting "the unity of things and me" [13].

3. The aesthetic trend and development prospect of contemporary image oil painting

3.1 Aesthetic value trend of contemporary image oil painting

Zheng Gong of China Institute of Fine Arts said, "Modern Chinese image oil painting has two tasks: on the one hand, in the context of globalization, it activates traditional spirit through foreign media, and conducts different cultural communication through language; on the other hand, it seeks the universal meaning of human life, individuality, in public issues. "Therefore, how to stimulate the personalized aesthetic morphemes in various situations is an important problem facing the current modern Chinese image oil painting. Contemporary oil paintings include the writing of spontaneous style, the color full of spirituality, the artistic conception of Oriental charm, etc., which are the individual expression that the artist shows in the expression of the works, and also the strengthening of the theme aesthetic thought and the liberal artistic spirit. In terms of modelling performance, still retains the shelf of painting characteristics, but its aesthetic ideology and extreme abstract expression, namely the pursuit of emotional expression of things, at the same time not with the objective form of separation, generally between realistic and abstract, presents a lively, intuitive, abstract aesthetic vision.

"Sense" is the modern aesthetic concept of "meaning". Painters caught himself inside the most real thoughts, and show it, let it can as much as possible to his mind image, which is pen to meaning, to express their heart and their own culture, but also to let oneself and the audience produce an emotional resonance, thus the unique humanistic aesthetic thoughts in the Chinese traditional art. Therefore, how to express the aesthetic feeling of "image" in the oil painting of "image" is an important subject that the painter must carry out, and whether its aesthetic value is given full play^[14].

In addition, the most basic media that directly conveys the aesthetic feeling of the object with color as the main body also has a great influence on the aesthetic representation of modern image oil painting. Color expression is not only to reproduce the figurative color characteristics of an object, but also to pay attention to the subjective emotion spillover of the painter under the visual feeling of the specific object. The painter can only convey his own life experience and artistic pursuit, and his emotions and the cultural spirit of the nation, in this way, he can show a kind of color aesthetics beyond the material

reality itself. In contemporary image painting, color combines the advantages of Chinese and western aesthetics, in different brushwork, texture, and the painter under different subjective feelings, color has not only represents a color, it has been promoted to another level, which constitutes a more spiritual connotation of visual effect, presents a decorative, imagery, abstract, and other diversified characteristics of color, so that a picture of the content and representation of further enriched^[15].

4. Conclusion

Image oil painting is a form of Chinese oil painting with local characteristics, based on Chinese spirit and culture, and its integration, precipitation and reorganization through long-term practice. Chinese image oil painting is not only a kind of thinking reconstruction of western culture, but also a kind of return to humanistic spirit. It pays attention to human subjective initiative and emotional natural overflow, focuses on rational understanding, not superficial phenomenon, but seeks subjective clear and clear feeling.

The innovation and development of Chinese modern image oil painting is deeply influenced by the traditional painting theory and artistic expression concept accumulated over thousands of years. It has an endless source of creativity and unlimited room for development and expansion. Therefore, "modern image" oil painting is not only the inheritance and development of Chinese traditional aesthetics, but also the innovation of "ontology", but also the "local" with strong local color, has become an important indicator for the international community to understand Chinese painting, but also the basis and external expression of China's "cultural confidence". China's excellent traditional aesthetics has always been the driving force and pointer to promote the development of Chinese modern painting art. At present, more and more oil painters are deeply rooted in the traditional freehand aesthetics, and combined with their oil paintings, in the perceptual and rational, concrete and abstract dialectics thought, the freehand aesthetic feelings fully expressed, which has a certain cultural connotation, also has a strong visual appeal and diversified expressive force.

"Image" is an important part of the development of Chinese art, but also one of the important factors to promote the diversified development of Chinese art. It is important to note that the contemporary image of oil painting is not using oil painting materials to express traditional Chinese painting art, it is not the traditional aesthetic culture and foreign kind of external combination, is not simply the traditional aesthetic elements image, symbolic, it is just through the traditional painting idea of the freehand aesthetic spirit deep mining and extraction, and the current era of aesthetic echo, thus show a kind of localization and modern aesthetic characteristics of painting form.

To sum up, in our country's cultural consciousness and cultural confidence internal drive, we should seriously the connotation of our freehand spirit, core implication and the expression of painting, it is neither a brushwork sweep, also is not a kind of literati painting patterns and ink interesting surface imitation, but a kind of zen to the inner world, has a huge creation space and exuberant vitality. At the same time, we want to show the enterprising art innovation spirit and solid practical work, follow the era development needs, and the current era aesthetic thoughts under the trend of diverse art, is not limited to will be subject to realistic painting performance, and then develop a new, a long history, and with the connotation of the Chinese nation aesthetic spirit of contemporary artistic conception of oil painting creation.

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Frontiers in Art Research

ISSN 2618-1568 Vol. 5, Issue 18: 110-119, DOI: 10.25236/FAR.2023.051819

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