

Chinese Surrealism in the First Half of the Twentieth Century: The Road of Cultural Integration and Innovation

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Abstract: Since the 20th century, Chinese painting has evolved under Western influences, diversifying its development. Art interpretation now transcends technical mastery to probe deeper into the essence of art. This paper explores the emergence and evolution of Chinese surrealism in the first half of the 20th century, examining its international influences, notable artists, and cultural integration. It delves into the interplay between tradition and modernity, surrealism's role in contemporary interactive art, and its fusion with traditional cultural elements, revealing the distinctiveness of Chinese art and the profound impact of surrealism on Chinese culture.

Keywords: Surrealism; Chinese Art; Cultural Fusion; Tradition and Modernity

1. INTRODUCTION

With the conclusion of the First World War in 1918, Western society found itself mired in economic depression and social disarray. A prevailing sense of pessimism and misanthropy permeated the populace, fostering a cultural milieu characterized by nihilism and decadence within literary and artistic circles, ultimately precipitating a significant transformation in the art world (Galbraith, 1998). Following the epochs of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, the era witnessed the emergence of numerous modern art movements, including Surrealism, which manifested amidst this backdrop of societal upheaval and artistic renaissance (Brettell, 1999; Hopkins, 2000). Surrealist paintings, predominantly distinguished by their portrayal of the dream reality and the investigation of the "subconscious," have wielded a profound influence on the evolution of modern art in its entirety (Lewis, 2007; Lucio et al., 2020), and surrealism has permeated nearly every domain of literature and art, encapsulating an alternative form of engagement with contemporary social realities. Surrealist painters dedicated themselves to unveiling the latent aspects of the subconscious through dream imagery in their works. Flourishing initially during World War I and enduring for nearly half a century until the 1970s, this artistic movement continues to exert a considerable influence on contemporary art creation (Paung, 2017). Despite the century-long trajectory of surrealist

painting since its inception, artists exhibit varied inclinations in selecting the language of surrealist expression. Notably, there exists no standardized style or appearance within its manifestation. However, a consistent conceptual underpinning endures throughout: the exploration of the latent "surrealism" residing deep within the human psyche (Kocur & Leung, 2012; Sheringham, 2006). Nevertheless, the fundamental essence of the concept remains consistent: namely, the exploration of the "surreal" concealed within the depths of the human psyche (Sas, 1999; Spittle, 2016). Throughout the evolution of Chinese contemporary art during the preceding three decades, the pervasive influence of surrealism and its utilization of artistic language have remained ubiquitous (Sheringham, 2006). In China, following the 85 Art Trend movement, a substantial influx of Western modern artists has permeated the Chinese art sphere, prompting an increasing number of artists to embrace emerging art trend (Stallabrass, 2020; Xianting, 1993). Surrealism, a prominent Western modern art movement, has captured the interest of domestic artists in China. Its distinctive artistic presentation and ideological expression have inspired many artists, offering fresh perspectives and insights (LeBaron, 2002; MacLagan, 2001). After three decades of evolution, the artistic concepts and expressive patterns of Surrealism enjoy favour among numerous artists in contemporary China. The development of surrealism spans decades, constituting a literary and artistic genre that has evolved alongside other artistic forms. Through continuous evolution and differentiation, surrealism has navigated a trajectory of perpetual development (Pollack, 2018). Surrealism has expanded into prominent art categories, originating from early poetry and extending its influence into theatre, painting, sculpture, film, and various other artistic domains (Zalman, 2017). Surrealism exists across various art disciplines, each with distinct characteristics and seemingly disconnected from one another. There is no unified and organized manifestation of surrealism; instead, it flourishes independently within its respective fields. Hence, it is crucial to theoretically categorize and summarize the transformative patterns of surrealism (Hopkins, 2004; Parkinson, 2015). Surrealist literature and art across major categories exhibit diverse contents, with surrealism not distinctly defined in all seven categories and some lacking its presence entirely, appearing vacant. Analogous to Newton's discovery of the arrangement of nine planets, surrealism also demonstrates regularities across various art categories (Finkelstein, 2017). Hence, it holds considerable significance to endeavour to validate the existence of surrealist literature based on the inherent characteristics of the artistic

medium, and to discern an existential principle amidst the complexity of artistic genres (Breton et al., 1936). This paper delves into the background, artistic language characteristics, and aesthetic expression of Chinese surrealist art to unveil its cultural value and aesthetic significance. Given China's growing emphasis on "soft power" development, understanding the connotation and future trajectory of local culture and art becomes crucial. Despite scholarly attention to the stylistic evolution of contemporary figurative painting, little focus has been placed on exploring its underlying value or unique artistic language. Consequently, research on the connotation of Chinese surrealism remains insufficient, lacking solid academic consensus or controversy. Therefore, an in-depth examination of its aesthetic language aims to complement existing academic endeavours and offer a detailed interpretation of contemporary art development.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Surrealism emerged in France following World War I, amidst a period of profound reflection on the war's causes and the widespread devastation it wrought, as people sought avenues of hope amidst the darkness (Van den Berg, 2015). As a consequence of the Great Depression that followed the war, societal standards of living experienced a precipitous decline, engendering pervasive sentiments of pessimism characterized by disdain and aversion (Welling, 2007). In this milieu, prompted by introspection catalysed by the war, artists engaged in a collective negation of prevailing realities, seeking refuge in the pursuit of ethereal dreamscapes. This creative endeavour served as a means of distancing themselves from the melancholy engendered by the harsh realities of their time (Whiteley, 1993). In 1900, the renowned psychologist Sigmund Freud published his seminal work "Die Traumdeutung", which conducted a rigorous and scientific examination of human dreams. This pivotal publication elucidated the integral role dreams play in human existence, highlighting their capacity to provide access to the unconscious or subconscious realms of the mind (Brodskaja, 2012; Stockwell, 2016). In 1924, the Surrealist Manifesto was publicly disseminated by the French poet André Breton (Borgmann, 1999). The release of the Manifesto heralded the formal inception of the surrealist movement, characterized therein as pure psychological automatism. This mode of expression, articulated through oral discourse, written prose, or alternative mediums, operates beyond the confines of reason, guided solely by thought, thereby transcending conventional aesthetic or moral

frameworks. Following André Breton's publication of the Surrealist Manifesto, a succession of exhibitions showcasing surrealist paintings ensued, solidifying "surrealism" as the official designation for the genre (Breton, 1969; Jiménez et al., 2013). Surrealism's visual expression is subversive and irrational, eschewing reality for exploratory content that vividly articulates the inner world. As a result, "surrealism" often connotes the unusual and imaginative in common parlance. The genesis of surrealism is inherently rooted in specific social contexts (Beharriell, 1962). In the tumultuous milieu of war and chaos, various influences prompted individuals to lose interest in and ultimately diverge from traditional forms and modes of artistic expression. Many artists turned their attention to Freudian psychoanalysis, juxtaposing disparate elements and revelling in the depiction of illogical connections devoid of rational constraints (Spector, 1989). In an effort to distance oneself from the harsh realities of cruelty and sorrow, Breton posits that Freud's work rediscovered the significance of imagination and dreams. Freud's contributions facilitated access to the subconscious faculties of the mind, thereby aiding in the restoration of imagination to its rightful prominence (Lepetit, 2014). Dreams, or phantasies, play a pivotal role in representing facets of the mind beyond the grasp of reason, evoking alternative logical constructs and imaginative formations distinct from those found in wakeful states. They serve as the most direct manifestation of unbridled and irrational mental activity, reflecting the innate creative capacity of the human mind in its pursuit of fulfilling desires (Felman, 1987). Dreams serve as a conduit for revealing unconscious content and, through free association, furnish art with a wealth of symbolic imagery derived from humanity's deepest experiences. According to Freud, art represents a collectively accepted reality wherein the artist's imagination, employing symbols and substitutions, elicits genuine emotional response (Hunt, 1996). Surrealist motifs diverge from conventional patterns of thought by advocating the dissolution of boundaries between reason and reality. They strive to amalgamate real experiences, the subconscious, and dreams while frequently juxtaposing disparate elements to construct a phantasmagoria that surpasses ordinary reality. Artistic expression predominantly delves into the contradictions inherent within the subconscious mind, including themes of life and death, the past and the future, among others. To articulate such whimsical concepts, surrealist painters commonly employ specialized expression techniques such as the topography method, the frottage method, and the automatism technique in crafting their works (Prescott, 1912). Furthermore, in order to depict distortion or

contradiction with the tangible world, surrealist artists frequently utilize precise and realistic techniques to convey the surreal realm. Surrealism emphatically asserts that reality governed by reason and logic is illusory, positing that only the fusion of dreams and reality embodies truth and objectivity. It advocates the amalgamation of life, death, dreams, reality, the past, and the future, seeking to unify them. Consequently, their artworks are distinguished by elements of mystery, horror, absurdity, and strangeness (MacLagan, 2001).

3. THE RISE OF SURREALISM IN CHINA

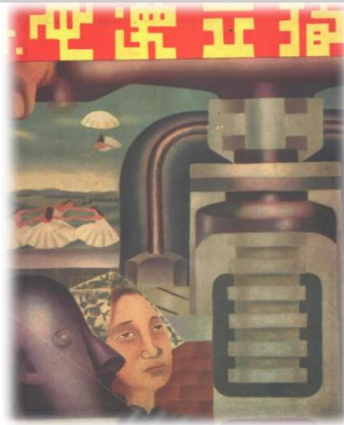
3.1 Development of Surrealist Art in China in the First Half of the 20th

During the early 20th century, the influence of Western modernist cultural trends introduced surrealism to China. Subsequently, the Chinese Independent Art Association, notably active in Japan and Guangzhou, emerged as a avant-garde Western painting society within China. Although knowledge and research on the Western New School of Painting began circulating in Chinese art circles following the New Culture Movement, the social and political milieu of the time hindered significant attention towards modern Western art until the emergence of avant-garde societies such as the Duel Society and the Chinese Independent Art Association. It was only with the advent of these avant-garde movements that modern Western painting and artistic thought began to capture widespread attention. Consequently, many Chinese artists shifted their focus from traditional 19th-century realistic painting to embrace Western modern art trends. In 1934, Liang Xihong and Li Zhongsheng, both of whom had studied in Japan and held a deep appreciation for surrealism, were influenced by the "Independent Art Association" in Japan. They, along with Zeng Ming, Zhao Beast, Li Dongping, and others, established the "Independent Institute of Chinese Fine Arts" in Tokyo. Additionally, they founded related institutes and magazines such as Independent Fine Arts and Fine Arts in Guangzhou. Through these platforms, they commenced the introduction of surrealism's artistic style and its principles, publishing articles and creations that aimed to introduce surrealism to China. On July 31st, a group comprising Zhao Beast, Su Wolong, Li Zhongsheng, Li Dongping, Huang Langping, Fang Rending, Yang Yinfang, Zeng Yi, Liang Xihong, Bai Sha, and others organized the "Ten Chinese Writers in Japan Exhibition" at the Tokyo-do Gallery in Kanda-ku, Kambomachi, Tokyo. The exhibition showcased a variety of artworks, including Su Wolong's

"Spectral Fowl," Li Dongping's "Flower and Dish," Zeng Yi's "Cow Sleeping in the State," Yang Yinfang's "Rabbit," Liang Xihong's "Young Girl in Yellow," Fang Rending's "Ripe Fruit," and works by other painters. In February 1935, the Chinese Independent Art Association organized its inaugural exhibition in Guangzhou. The public event included invited artists Guan Liang and Wu Xian, who showcased prints of works by renowned painters such as Chagall and Picasso. This introduction of Western modernism injected new vitality into the Chinese painting scene. However, the exhibition received an underwhelming response as many found it difficult to comprehend Western modernist painting styles. Despite this setback, the artists persisted in promoting surrealism with a renewed artistic vision, aiming to invigorate the stagnant Chinese art scene with fresh perspectives and innovative approaches. In May of the same year, members of the Chinese Independent Art Association articulated the Association's manifesto in the publication *Independent Art*, asserting the necessity for a new era of painting. They advocated for the mutual respect of diverse doctrines and propositions united under the spirit of this new painting, emphasizing the importance of freedom and independence in creation as a social and cultural avant-garde to the wider public. The introduction of Western modernist ideas caused significant upheaval in the Chinese painting scene, with the Chinese Independent Art Association establishing itself as a vanguard of the avant-garde trend in Chinese art. Disheartened by the decline of the painting scene in Guangzhou, Liang Xihong stressed the importance of artists remaining uninfluenced by their surroundings, underscoring the independence of artistic spirit. Similarly, Zhao Shou emphasized the necessity for art appreciation to be approached with a "sharp, multifaceted eye" and "deep-rooted learning." The painters' reflections on the general public's lack of understanding of Western painting offered valuable insights to the Chinese painting world. Pang Xunqin, a Chinese artist who studied oil painting in Russia and France, co-founded China's inaugural modern art group, the "Duelling Lanes Society," in Shanghai in 1932. "Composition," depicted in Figure 1, and created in 1934, exemplifies a quintessential surrealist painting. "Composition" was featured in the 3rd Juran Society Exhibition. In this artwork, the right side of the canvas is dominated by the profile of a printing press, with three fingers resting atop it in the upper left corner. Contextually, the year 1934 marked a tumultuous period in China, besieged by internal and external challenges. The three fingers symbolize foreign invaders, domestic darkness, and feudalistic influences, metaphorically pressing down on China. On the left side of the painting, a sorrowful labouring woman

signifies the impoverished and backward state of China at the time, reflecting the hardships faced by the Chinese populace. Adjacent to her stands a robot, emblematic of the industrial might of Western capitalism, which encroached upon traditional Chinese markets, exacerbating the plight of working-class individuals. In the upper left corner, a ballet dancer represents the hopeful aspirations of the Chinese people for a brighter future. Although employing a surrealist painting technique rich in symbolism, the artwork tragically met destruction in 1966.

Pang Xunqin, Composition.



**Front cover of *Duli Manhua (Independent Manhua)*, no. 4, Oct. 1935.
Courtesy of the Pang Hiunkin (Pang Xunqin) Archives at the Li Ching
Cultural and Educational Foundation.**

Figure 1: Composition - By Pang Xunqin, 1934

3.2 Influence of International Surrealism on China

The primary distinction in the content expression of surrealist paintings, compared to prior artistic forms, lies in its inspiration from Freud's psychoanalytic theory. Surrealist paintings incorporate dreams and the contents of the human subconscious, materializing invisible and amalgamated thoughts. This presentation of previously inexpressible content offers viewers a novel visual and psychological impact, as it arranges disparate elements within the same canvas in a coherent manner. The advent of surrealism represents a significant departure from the traditional confines of objective expression in painting. Surrealism allows for the portrayal of absurd and bizarre content as tangible elements of reality, evoking a sense of familiarity among viewers. Illustrated in Figure 2, Dali's "Dream Caused by the Flight of a Bee around a Pomegranate a Second Before Awakening" exemplifies a quintessential dream depiction. The scene unfolds as a manifestation of the artist's wife's dream following a bee sting. The bee's stinger transforms into a spear, her fear conjures a

tiger, and the cliff symbolizes her inner insecurity. The surreal elements, such as fish emerging from the pomegranate and a tiger emerging from the fish, underscore the scene's peculiarity. The symbolic interpretation of the imagery, including pomegranates, bees, tigers, elephants, and the sea, is multifaceted, with each possessing profound and potent erotic significance. Despite the clarity of colours and the realism of the portrayal, the overall composition defies logical interpretation.

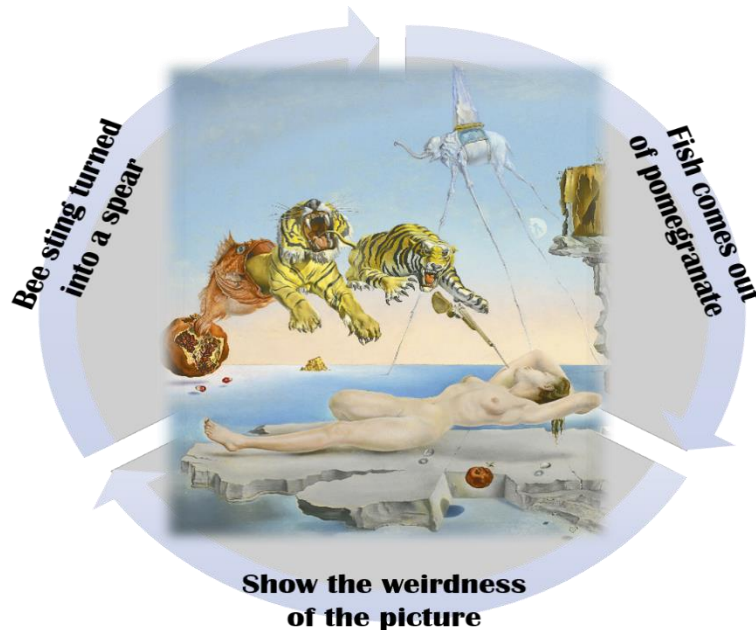


Figure 2: "Dream Caused by Fluttering Bees" - Dali 1947

China, renowned for its divergent thinking, boasts a rich tradition in the realm of painting. Surrealism, with its unprecedented expressive content, ignited the creative fervour of domestic artists, prompting them to venture into this innovative expressive domain. Initially, Chinese painters primarily emulated surrealist paintings with a direct understanding, thus, the direct impact of surrealist paintings during that period pertained to the expressive content of the artworks. Artists redirected their gaze from the tangible realm to the elusive domain of abstraction, incorporating not only dreams and the subconscious but also themes of time and life into their works. For instance, Cao Li's paintings "Open Sheet Music" and "Paradise" exemplify this transition.

As depicted in Figure 3, "Paradise" offers a distinct departure from traditional Chinese oil painting, featuring a juxtaposition of skeletons and flesh, money and entertainment. In this materialistic "paradise," human instincts are laid bare, with avaricious gazes nearly bursting forth from the faces depicted. The sombre palette of the painting, reminiscent of a dream, evokes a sense of repulsion. Through such surreal and ironic expression,

the artist jolts the viewer and elicits a resonant response.

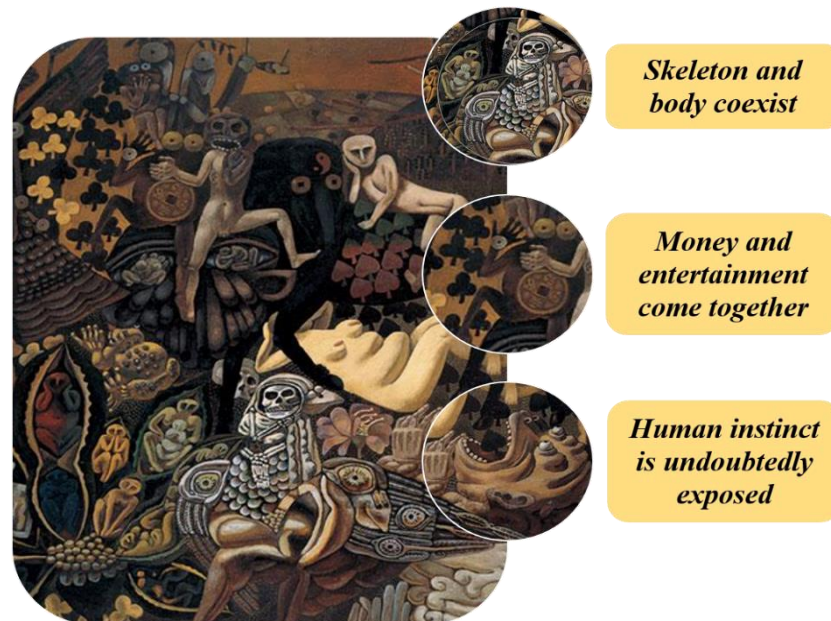


Figure 3: "Paradise" by Cao Li 1990

The perceptual impact of surrealist paintings has profoundly influenced the perspectives of Chinese painters, contributing significantly to the remarkable flourishing of Chinese contemporary art. Within the realm of surrealist paintings, diverse interpretations of the subconscious and "mental automatism" abound. Notably, distinctions emerge between magical surrealism, epitomized by Dalí, and natural surrealism, embodied by Miró. Such phenomena underscore to painters that there exist no inherent boundaries in painting; rather, our artistic expressions can transcend the limits of our thoughts. Enhanced cognitive understanding has catalysed innovation and rapid progression within Chinese contemporary painting. Thus, under the auspices of such guiding principles, the emergence of China's "New Generation Art" and Pop art forms in the 1990s signifies a pivotal shift from traditional easel-bound painting. Concurrently, installation art experienced a flourishing period, albeit beyond the scope of this discussion. Painting, once confined to conventional paradigms, now transcends mere brush strokes, encompassing a multifaceted ideological essence derived from surrealist painting. In Zhong Biao's artwork "When Love Becomes Memories," crafted in 1997, as depicted in Figure 4, viewers encounter not only the juxtapositions typical of surrealism but also the introduction of novel symbolic elements into the composition. The artist employs a traffic ban symbol to convey his rejection of past love, enhancing the thematic precision and fostering innovation in expression.



When love becomes memories

The painter uses a no-passage symbol on traffic to express his rejection of past love, making the theme more accurate and more innovative.

Figure 4: "When love becomes memories" - Zhong Biao 1997

3.3 Representatives of Chinese Surrealism

The advent of reform and opening up has facilitated enhanced exchanges between China and the global community by fostering a conducive environment for interaction. Prior to this transformative period, Chinese artists grappled with the legacy of the Cultural Revolution, which predominantly dictated their artistic endeavours towards political themes. However, with the initiation of reform and opening up, there emerged a relaxation in political life, thereby ushering in significant changes in China's political and economic landscape. Consequently, the ideological constraints on Chinese artists were alleviated, providing them with a more liberated and conducive creative environment. Furthermore, China's closer integration with Western culture exerted a profound influence on the trajectory of Chinese art, as artists sought fresh perspectives and embraced new theoretical paradigms from the West. This burgeoning connection prompted Chinese artists to embark on a widespread emulation of Western artistic ideas and styles. By the mid-1980s, a notable ideological shift occurred within the Chinese literary sphere in response to evolving artistic trends, prompting a profound realization that previous endeavours had primarily focused on the superficial adoption of Western artistic techniques, lacking a profound comprehension of the fundamental tenets of surrealism. The pursuit of absolute freedom has been a consistent theme in the intellectual and artistic movements of our century, with surrealism embodying this pursuit most profoundly. As surrealism emerged and evolved throughout history, it left a significant imprint on world art. In contemporary China, there exists a reflection on surrealism's creative ethos. For instance, the "Forward Chinese Youth Art Exhibition" in Beijing in May 1985 stands as a memorable event in modern Chinese art history.

Notably, Zhang Qun and Meng Luding's artwork "In the New Era - The Revelation of Adam and Eve" employed highly allegorical elements, drawing from surrealist techniques. As depicted in Figure 5, the artwork illustrates the Biblical narrative of Adam and Eve's transgression in the Garden of Eden. The composition portrays male and female human figures, positioned atop one another on either side of the image. Within the expansive framework, a contemporary female character holds a tray of red apples, while a hungry young man awaits something with his hand resting on a dinner plate in the lower right corner. The background extends infinitely, depicting land and seascape vistas. The artworks reveal the integration of the artists' creations with the concept of "surrealism," emphasizing the spiritual essence of figurative painting and its departure from reality. In their burgeoning intellects, they contemplate the relationship of figuration in art, whether subjective or objective, representing a tangible expression of the localization of Surrealism in China



Figure 5: "In the New Age - The Revelation of Adam and Eve" - Zhang Qun, Meng Luding 1985

In contemporary Chinese painting, we encounter remarkable artworks that draw inspiration from both Eastern "Zen" philosophy and Western "Freudian Dream Psychology." For instance, Tao Hong, a young oil painter, explores various themes in his works, ranging from the "Psychoanalysis" and "Communication Series" to the "Water Series" and "The Language of Things," culminating in "The Smile of Buddha" depicted in Figure 6. Each piece aims to convey a distinct spiritual essence while maintaining the artist's fundamental emotional direction and exploratory ethos. From spiritual analysis and profound catharsis to poetic introspection, Tao Hong's artworks delve into deep contemplation, distant

memories, and ultimately, the serene smile of Buddha, thereby encapsulating a surrealistic emotional journey.

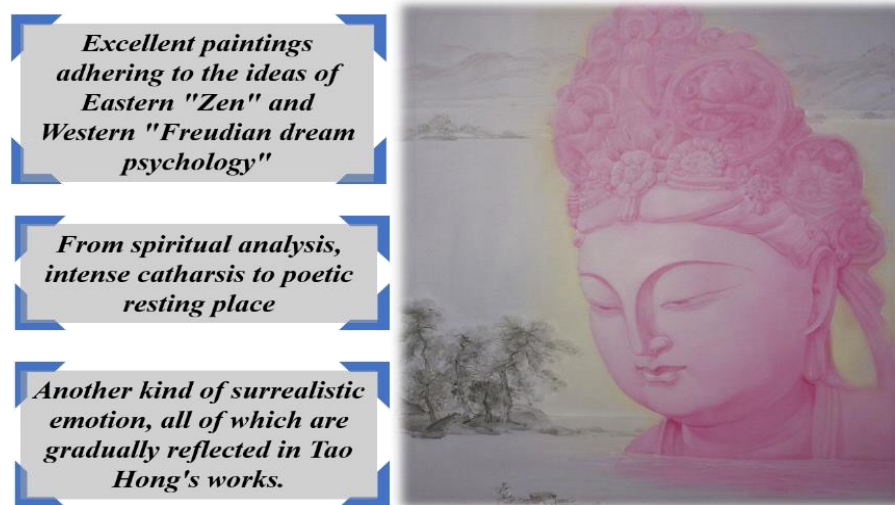


Figure 6: "The Smile of the Buddha's Kingdom" - by Tao Hong, 2007

4. CULTURAL INTEGRATION: THE COLLISION OF TRADITION AND MODERNITY

4.1 Surrealism in Contemporary Interactive Art

Interaction design constitutes a pivotal element within user experience (UX) design, particularly as it aligns more closely with electronic, digital technologies, and internet commerce. This design facet follows a logical, prescriptive process, heavily reliant on technical support. Kevin Silver, a Senior Interaction Designer at IDEXX Labs, has conceptualized five dimensions of interaction design: textual guidance, visual representation, mediated objects and spaces, lifecycle, and action. Typically, discussions surrounding the outcome of interaction design centre on software products such as applications or websites rather than tangible, observable entities. The interrelationship between the two is depicted in Figure 7.

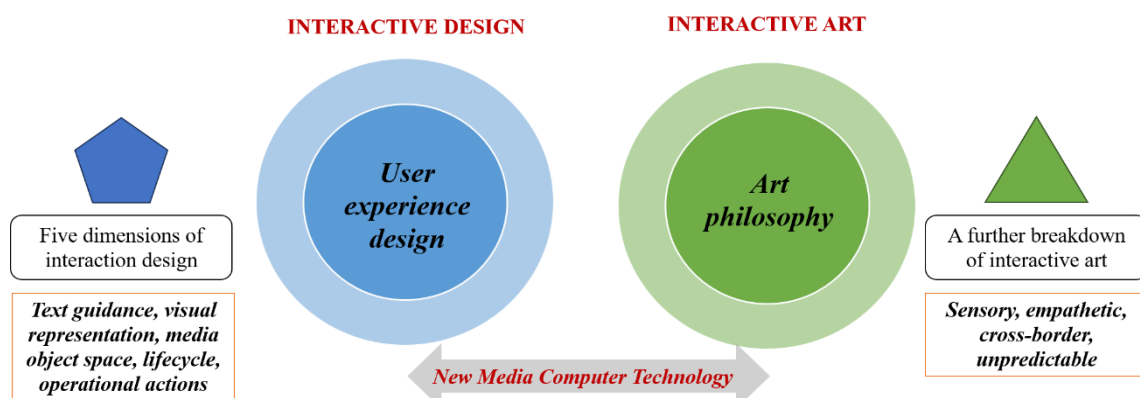
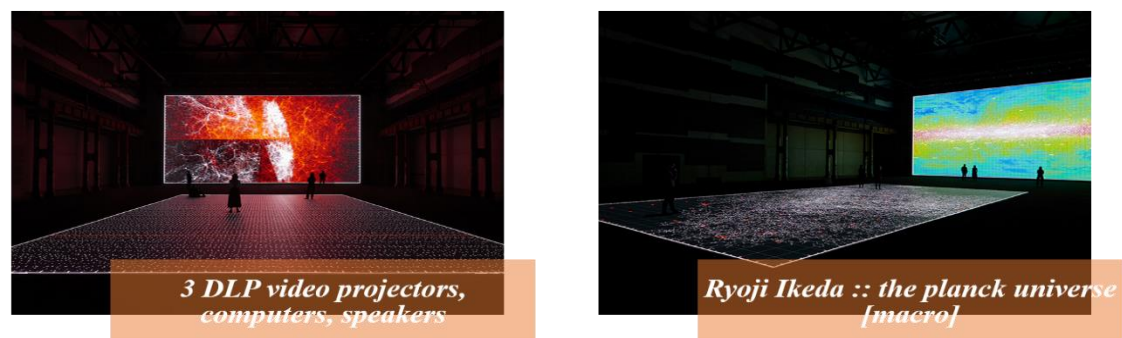


Figure 7: Modeling the Relationship between Interaction Design and Interaction Art

The exploration of interactive art has been pioneered and extensively studied within the Western art sphere. In the 1970s, with the rise of installation and video art, artists recognized the potential of interactive art as a means to engage with audiences. Artist Dick Higgins introduced the concept of "Intermedia," denoting diverse interdisciplinary artistic endeavours spanning various genres, thus popularizing the notion of interaction within visual art. Figure 8 illustrates an exhibition showcasing the fusion of Surrealism and Interactive Art at the ZKM Centre for Art and Media in Germany in 2013. The emergence of digital interactive art during the 1980s fostered increased collaboration between art and science. Notably, institutions such as the ZKM Center for Art and Media, the Austrian Center for Electronic Art, and the Dutch Electronic Art Festival spearheaded exhibitions and museums dedicated to interactive media art. Museums and galleries progressively integrated digital media art forms into their exhibitions, signalling ongoing expansion in the exchange of digital media within artistic showcases. These developments signify the continued advancement of the interactive art category facilitated by technological integration.



Ryoji Ikeda's micro | macro sits at the intersection of art and quantum physics. Using the Planck Scale (which measures the smallest components of the universe – atoms), Ikeda tests the limits of what is observable and knowable in our universe in an attempt to understand it.

Figure 8: Surrealism and interactive art fusion display

4.2 Traditional Cultural Elements in Surrealism

Surrealism, deeply influenced by Freudian psychoanalysis, delves further into the depiction of the artist's psyche within the artwork and the exploration of the subconscious. Freud posited that the subconscious constitutes the fundamental impetus of human spiritual existence and that all creative endeavours originate from mental processes; the psychology of living beings gives rise to the framework of thought, drawing its vitality from the depths of the subconscious. Artistic creation, therefore, serves as the realization of subconscious desires. Artists have begun to articulate

their suppressed inner emotions through their creations. Those who utilize instinct and spontaneity as wellsprings of creativity also engage in a form of self-psychotherapy. The concept of "rationality" no longer distinguishes intuition, but signifies a profound shift in epistemology and methodology. Rationality and intuition merge into a Chinese-style philosophical framework, integrating with traditional Chinese culture and social reality. The painting styles of older artists tend to adhere to traditional realism, often reflecting themes promoting ideological narratives associated with socialism. They generally lack understanding of Western modernist art and philosophy, resulting in idealistic works conveying positive sentiments. In contrast, contemporary artists, influenced by modern culture, mass media, and technology, diversify their artistic forms, leaning towards "micro-narratives" to convey complex spiritual thoughts. Contemporary society, marked by widening wealth gaps and economic pressures, induces feelings of insignificance and anxiety among individuals. Painters draw from this inner world of spiritual turmoil and life fragments to express both the suppressed pain and societal impacts of modern development.



Figure 9: "Winter Snow" - Cao Jingping 2013

In "Winter Snow" by Cao Jingping, the artist employs delicate line drawings to portray a serene winter landscape featuring snow-covered pavilions and trees, as depicted in Fig. 9. Through this traditional Chinese painting technique, the artwork evokes the aesthetic beauty of classical Oriental art while conveying the genuine emotional essence of the scenery. It poignantly reflects the weariness and melancholy experienced by modern individuals amidst their busy lives, while also expressing the artist's longing for a tranquil existence reminiscent of the idyllic peach blossom garden. Thus, the piece exhibits a narrative quality infused with situational and surrealistic elements.



Figure 10: Li Jikai's representative works on display

In a sequence of artworks by the emerging painter Li Jikai, the central theme revolves around the "little man," depicted as a distinctive pictorial motif. As illustrated in Fig. 10, these "little men" find themselves amidst a variety of magnified objects, such as piles of ruins, colossal tables, or perched atop the bones of giants. In these depictions, the diminutive figures are often portrayed in contemplation or with penetrating gazes. In Li Jikai's artwork, the portrayal of the "little man" as consistently diminutive serves to accentuate the vastness of space and surrounding objects, intensifying the sense of loneliness and melancholy inherent in the depicted scenes. This juxtaposition of expansive spaces with small characters evokes a mood of aimless wandering and profound sadness. Employing illogical and fantastical narrative elements, Li Jikai conveys his inner melancholy and sorrow in a manner that is childlike, innocent, and organic. His paintings serve as a medium for expressing his most genuine and raw emotions, reflecting introspection rather than a focus on broader societal or political themes. Li Jikai has articulated that every individual possesses the right to articulate their life experiences, and his artworks predominantly represent manifestations of his own anxiety, panic, and sadness, aiming to utilize painting as a form of emotional therapy and self-exploration.

5. CONCLUSION

Through an examination of Chinese surrealism during the initial decades of the 20th century, several significant insights emerge. Firstly, the global surrealist movement exerted a profound influence on Chinese artistic discourse, offering novel avenues for conceptualization and creative

representation. Secondly, the emergence of Chinese surrealism signifies not merely an adoption of Western artistic conventions but also a recontextualization within the framework of traditional Chinese cultural ethos, thereby reflecting a distinctive cultural ethos. Eminent figures within Chinese surrealism facilitated the integration of surrealist principles into the Chinese artistic milieu through their innovative endeavours, thus contributing positively to the socio-political and cultural landscape of China during that era. The incorporation of traditional cultural motifs within surrealist works not only imbues them with distinct Chinese characteristics but also serves as a reservoir of inspiration for the continued evolution and revitalization of contemporary Chinese art. Moreover, the integration of surrealism into contemporary interactive art underscores the dynamic and multifaceted nature of this artistic genre. Through the amalgamation of conventional and contemporary components, artists cultivate innovative artistic expressions that serve as vanguards in the evolution of Chinese contemporary art. In conclusion, the emergence of Chinese surrealism during the initial decades of the 20th century marks a significant epoch in the annals of Chinese art, signifying a pivotal amalgamation and transformation of Chinese cultural ethos. The surrealist endeavours of this era not only established fundamental underpinnings for subsequent artistic evolution but also infused distinctive spiritual nuances into the fabric of Chinese contemporary art.

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