

Historical Inheritance and Folklore Memory-Development and Innovation of Imagery Expression in Chinese Painting

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Abstract: This thesis delves into an exploration of the historical lineage of imagery expression within Chinese paintings, while also investigating the intricate interplay between folkloric memory and imagery in Chinese art. Additionally, it scrutinizes the contemporary reinterpretation of historical themes in Chinese painting. The introductory section offers a comprehensive review of the historical evolution of Chinese pictorial imagery, encompassing its genesis and initial development, the classical legacy evident during the Song, Yuan, and Ming periods, as well as the transformations and continuations witnessed during the Qing Dynasty. This historical analysis illuminates the evolutionary trajectory of Chinese pictorial imagery. Furthermore, this study delves into the portrayal of folkloric elements within pictorial imagery and the modern transmutations of folk culture within the realm of Chinese painting. Chinese painting imagery, over different historical epochs and cultural settings, has exhibited an ability to evolve and thrive while consistently reflecting the depth and vibrancy of Chinese culture and society. This research contributes significantly to a nuanced comprehension of the contemporary significance of Chinese painting imagery within society, underscoring its enduring value and influence as a cultural heritage.

Keywords: Chinese Painting; Expression of Intent; Folk Culture; Historical Inheritance

1. INTRODUCTION

China's art has over 2300 years of history, starting with Chu's Warring States Dynasty Silk Art (Childs-Johnson & Major, 2023; Miller, 2022), but the word "China Drawing" dates back almost 100 years. But the word "China Drawing" came into being almost a hundred years ago. Until the 20th century, the word "drawing" had been replaced by "Chinese drawing". Until the 20th century, the word "China Painting" was not used in China,

but rather "drawing", "drawing", "drawing material" and "Danqing". The word "Chinese drawing" refers to the West, and it defines the kind of drawing according to the area. In the late Qing Dynasty, the term "Chinese painting" was only occasionally used when talking about Western painting.

The term "national painting" appeared later than "Chinese painting", and in 1921, the Shanghai Fine Arts School and the Shanghai Pegasus Association organized an exhibition, which was divided into national paintings and oil paintings (Ercums, 2014; Król, 2015; Zhang, 2023a, 2023b).

Since then, art schools all over the world have set up departments (sections) and classes in Chinese painting. These two different designations are not just literal omissions; "Chinese painting" is not a simplification of "Chinese painting". The change from "Chinese painting" to "national painting" was a product of the semi-colonial and semi-feudal society.

When the imperialist ships and cannons smashed the door of China, foreign goods, foreign languages, foreign paintings, and so on came in. To distinguish between imported goods appeared a series of relatively new terms such as national goods, national literature, national painting, etc. At the end of 1927, Cai Yuanpei in the drafting of the proposal to establish the National University of the Arts, clearly stipulated that the University of the Arts set up the School of Painting, the Western School of Painting (Ho, 2020). The word "ethnic drawing" came into being along with "ethnic language", "ethnic art" and "ethnic theatre". Since the foundation of New China, the word "National Painting" is still in use. The name "National Painting" was still used after New China was established. When the Beijing Academy of National Painting was set up in 1957, Zhou Enlai proposed changing its name to "Beijing Academy of Chinese Painting" (Cao, 2020; Shen, 2017). From then on, "Chinese Painting" became a recognized and unified name.

Until the late 1930s, the terms "Chinese painting" and "national painting" were synonymous, collectively encompassing literati paintings and Academy scroll paintings (Yang, 2021a, 2021b; Zhu & Zhu, 2022). Subsequently, the discovery and excavation of frescoes, silk paintings, lacquer paintings, and other artifacts expanded the scope and interpretation of "Chinese paintings." With the establishment of the People's Republic of China, folk art gained prominence within the national art landscape. "Chinese painting" once again assumed a broader and narrower connotation. In its broad sense, it encompassed the traditional art forms intrinsic to the Chinese culture, such as ancient silk paintings, lacquer paintings, frescoes, courtyard paintings, literati paintings, and various folk

art, distinguishing them from Western art forms. Initially, "Chinese painting" had a broad and encompassing definition, primarily serving the purpose of distinguishing domestic Chinese art from foreign art (Gong, 2012; Watt, 2010). As Western art gained a foothold in China, there was a need to differentiate Chinese art and emphasize its distinctive features, leading to the shift from the broad sense of "Chinese paintings" to a more specific meaning. It was emphasized that Chinese paintings should maintain a higher status than foreign art, reflecting the desire to preserve the uniqueness of Chinese artistic expressions.

Following the May Fourth New Culture Movement, there was a resurgence of interest in Chinese studies and their restructuring (Bresciani, 2023; Sturniolo, 2016). Within this context, "national painting" replaced "Chinese painting." With the popularization and diversification of the art of painting, "national painting" became a recognized category alongside oil painting, watercolor painting, woodblock prints, comics, and New Year's Paintings (Chang, 2019; Croizier, 2022; Gu, 2021). The term "Chinese painting" lost its association with "Chinese" art. Traditional Chinese painting was conceptually deconstructed, with distinct categories like New Year's paintings, comics, and murals dissociated from it. The meaning and scope of Chinese painting became fluid and contingent, subject to change over time and across regions, encompassing conceptual awareness, stylistic attributes, modes of expression, materials, and tools (Bonvillain, 2019; Voinov et al., 2018).

Today, Chinese painting continues to evolve and integrate, shifting from passive assimilation of Western art to active absorption and, at times, full Westernization (Cao, 2023; Lihui, 2023; Nakamura & Saltzman-Li, 2023; Xian, 2023). Compared to the past, Chinese painting has grown more diverse in form and style, with various experimental endeavors. The concept of Chinese painting is both clear and ambiguous. It is "clear" in the sense that its traditional artistic principles, stylistic attributes, tools, and materials have distinct expressive techniques and material aesthetics that set it apart from other art forms.

However, it is "fuzzy" due to the increasing international exchange of artistic ideas, resulting in fewer distinct characteristics. Modern Chinese art has transcended the confines of the "brush" and "rice paper." Given the plethora of "Chinese drawings," a precise definition has become challenging. Hence, the question of how to shape the future of Chinese painting is a matter worthy of contemplation and exploration (Feng, 2023; Hui, 2023; Shi, 2022; Wang, 2022).

2. HISTORICAL INHERITANCE OF IMAGERY EXPRESSION IN CHINESE PAINTING

2.1 Origins and Initial Development

After a thousand years of development and change, Chinese painting has become an important part of China's outstanding culture, forming its unique language and mode of thinking. The fusion of color and ink in Chinese painting has formed the most national style. The "Five Elements" is one of the most profound and widely influenced doctrines of Chinese culture.

Confucianism is an important guideline for Chinese people to settle down and guide their lives. Confucius, the representative figure of Confucianism, paid particular attention to the right color, and the right color he mentioned was the five colors of the Zhou, Confucius's concept of color had a far-reaching influence on Chinese paintings, which demanded harmony and unity in dealing with the relationship between colors and was the highest requirement for painters to meet when they created their works (Zhou, 2020). Taoist Zhuangzi lived in the same turbulent and painful times as Laozi, and valued the role of "softness" and "quietness". Facing the colorfulness of Confucianism, Lao Zi pursued simplicity and complexity. Black and white colors were his choice.

In the Neolithic era, there were more complex colors in the pottery, the Spring and Autumn and Warring States period of colorful silk paintings, the Wei, Jin, North and South Dynasties period of light and heavy colors, the Tang Dynasty period of rich and colorful, rich and beautiful, are enough to see that the development of the color of the Chinese paintings is formed in the continuous practice. After the Tang and Song dynasties, the rise of literati painting advocated the development of ink and wash with an emphasis on color. Before the Northern Song Dynasty, the works were influenced by the painting style of the Tang Dynasty, and the color of the picture still maintained the bright colors and delicate style. In the middle and late literati styles of painting made the paintings flourish, focusing on simple and light colors became a unique artistic style. In the middle of the Ming Dynasty, Qiu Ying's paintings drew on the ideas of literati painting, and his style of painting was colorful but not greasy, bright but not vulgar, he is the leader of green landscape in the late history of Chinese painting. During the Ming Dynasty, the bird and flower works were also confronted with ink, and the figure paintings were colorful. During the Qing Dynasty, Yun Shouping's paintings were very influential, and his bone-less painting method, and his light and natural colors were as colorful as watercolors,

which were refreshing and relaxing.

Chinese painting became a relatively independent aesthetic activity during the Qin and Han Dynasties, and in the Wei, Jin, and North and South Dynasties, it developed independent painting disciplines such as landscapes, figures, and birds and flowers, and in the Tang Dynasty, all kinds of subjects tended to mature. The article begins with the study of the Tang Dynasty, when landscape, figure, flower, and bird paintings became mature. Tang and Song dynasty painting consciousness are realistic, the Yuan dynasty is reflected in the tendency to write, the early Ming dynasty presents the spirit of realism, and the late face of the mountains and rivers in the face of the destruction of the spontaneity of writing, the Qing dynasty, although the Western realism techniques imported into China, but the writing occupy the mainstream of the painting world. The realism and realism here are relative, not in the full sense of the picture in the light and shadow of the realism, but more focused on the spirit of the tendency.

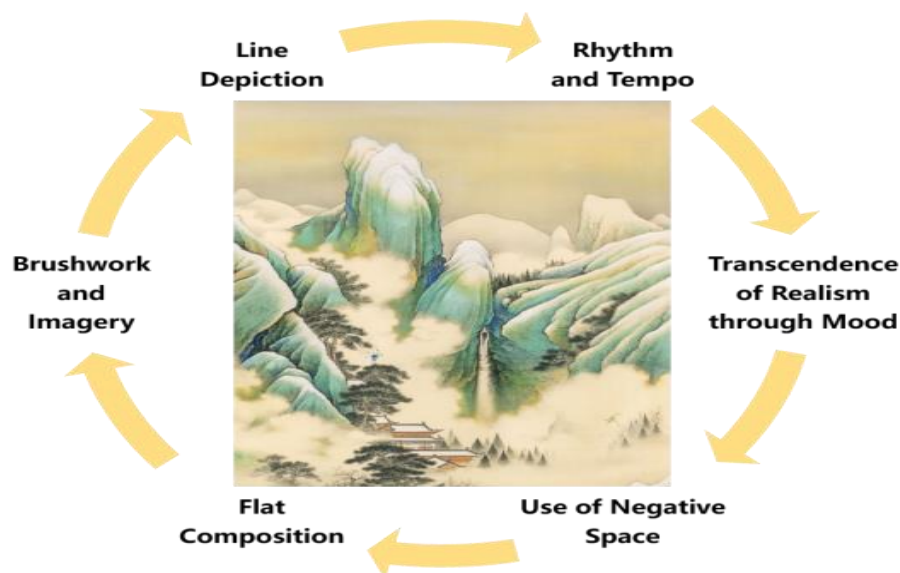


Figure 1: Key Mood Characteristics of Chinese Paintings

Chinese painting, exemplified in Figure 1, stands as an embodiment of traditional Chinese art with distinct and unique artistic qualities. It is characterized by an unwavering focus on evoking mood and conveying deep-seated emotions, placing great emphasis on the imaginative use of brush and ink. Lines play a pivotal role within the artwork, serving to delineate the forms of depicted objects while also conveying intricate emotions. The concept of "blank space" is pivotal in the composition, lending an aesthetic sense of harmony between reality and emptiness. The utilization of a flat composition imparts a sense of equilibrium to the image, with rhythm and rhyme orchestrating the pulse of life through the

arrangement of brushstrokes.

Chinese painting aspires to encapsulate the spirit of writing, seeking to distill the essence of subjects with economy of strokes, all the while delving deep into the realm of inner expression. This genre often selects nature and human subjects but underscores their philosophical and emotional underpinnings. Traditional techniques such as ink and wash rendering and pointillism offer a rich array of creative tools, while the fusion of poetry, calligraphy, and painting serves as a testament to the profound heritage of Chinese culture. These defining characteristics render Chinese painting a unique presence within the artistic domain, not only preserving historical and cultural legacies but also forging ahead in contemporary art, imparting profound thoughts and emotions to the beholder.

Chinese painting has exhibited diverse characteristics across different historical epochs. Table 1 delineates the defining features, notable artists, and representative works of Chinese painting within each historical period. The characteristics, artists, and works associated with each period collectively weave a rich tapestry of history and an array of stylistic diversity in Chinese painting.

Table 1: (a) Characteristics of Chinese Paintings and Representative Works of Various Historical Periods

Historical period	Characteristics of the paintings	Representative painter	Representative work (of an author or artist)
Ancient Times	Ancient Chinese paintings focused on the expression and symbolism of lines, mostly used to paint murals and scrolls, emphasizing traditional cultural values	Jia Siwen	Mural Painting of Han Wengong Ancestral Hall, Wang Xizhi's Tablet Postings
		Zhang Sangxiao	The Luoshen Fu Picture, the Xuanxiu Pagoda Posting
		Gu Kaizhi	The Lady of History, Luoshen Fu.
The Tang (618-907) and Song (960-1279) Dynasties	In the Tang Dynasty, landscape painting was the main focus, and in the Song Dynasty, the writing of flowers and birds was developed, focusing on the expression of chiaroscuro and vividness.	Li SiXun	Five Oxen, Bamboo, Stones
		Liang Kai	Wang Xizhi's Manuscripts for the Sacrifice of Nephews, Fish in Grass and Trees
		Fan Kuan	Traveling in the Streams, Mountains, Bamboo and Stones

Table 1: (b) Characteristics of Chinese Paintings and Representative Works of Various Historical Periods

The Yuan and Ming Dynasties (1279-1368)	The Yuan Dynasty landscape paintings	Huang Gongwang	Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains, Ink, Bird Album Page
	focused on strange peaks and rocks, and the Ming Dynasty saw the rise of literati paintings, which emphasized mood and chiaroscuro.	Wen Zhengming	Pine and Crane, Dwelling in the Sequoia Mountains
		Qiu Ying	The Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea, The Longevity Star Delivering Children
The Qing Dynasty (1644-1911)	Chinese painting of the Qing Dynasty inherited the classical tradition and was compatible with Western realism, forming a unique painting style of the Qing Dynasty.	Wang Shimin	Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains, Landscape and Water
		Zheng Xie	Pine Wind Lodge Drawing, Gardenia
		Qi Baishi	Shrimp, Twelve Riders

2.2 Classical Inheritance in the Song, Yuan and Ming Dynasties

After the establishment of the Northern Song Dynasty, the development of painting did not decline, and the establishment of the Hanlin Academy of Painting and Drawing led to a new development of painting, as shown in Figure 2. Doe's "Fish Playing with Algae", Cui Bai's "Double Happiness", Li Di's "Chickens Waiting to be Feeding", and Li Gonglin's "Horse", etc., are all extremely realistic. In addition, Song Huizong Zhao Ji was also a representative painter during the Northern Song Dynasty. His works, such as Hibiscus and Chicken, Loquat and Bird, and Ruihe, are vividly and accurately stylized, focusing on the realistic reproduction of the object. In terms of figure paintings, Zhao Ji's "Listening to the Qin" is also similar. In addition, Li Tang's "Cai Wei", Ma Lin's "Listening to the Pine Breeze", and Li Song's "Cargo Man" accurately portrayed the character's expressions, proportions, and clothing, and depicted them with a realistic approach and spirit. The most representative work of the Northern Song Dynasty is Zhang Zeduan's "Qingming Riverside", which is a vast and magnificent work that accurately reproduces history, although there are also "reduced strokes" such as Liang Kai's, but the use of which has not weakened the vividness and accuracy of the modeling. In landscape paintings, such as Fan Kuan's Traveling in the Streams and Mountains and Li Cheng's Moulin Xiu, the technique of "painting the flying roofs in the upward direction" has an early perspective effect. Su Shi's understanding

of "common form" and "common sense" and Wen Tong's ink and bamboo were limited to a few literati painters. Both Su Shi's Strange Stones in Dead Wood and Wen Tong's Ink and Bamboo, although expressed in ink and wash, have a strong sense of detail and texture. Although the ink and watercolor representation, from the details of the image to the texture of the view, all have a strong realism.

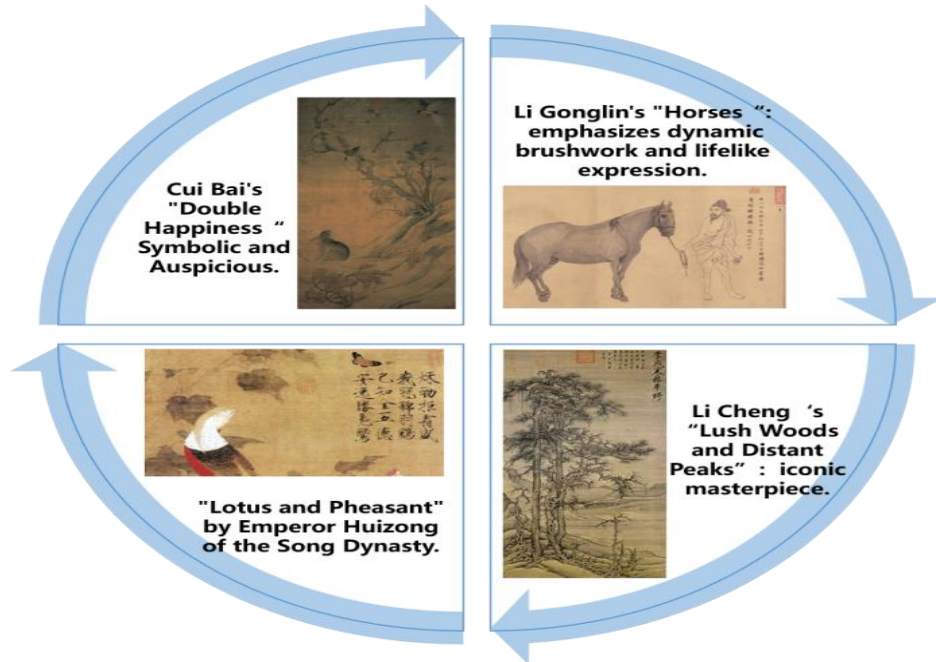


Figure 2: Representative Works of Song Dynasty Chinese Paintings

After the fall of the Southern Song Dynasty, literati painters formed factions with their ideas and relied on painting and calligraphy to express their aspirations. Due to the lack of attention from the rulers of the Yuan Dynasty and the low status of the scholars, they could only express their inner indignation through painting. Shifting from depicting reality to expressing their inner feelings, painting became an object of expression and trust. Zheng Sishao, a relic painter, painted orchids without roots or roots without soil to express his nostalgia for his homeland. Ni Zan even directly threw out the "Yu's bamboo to write in the chest of escape ear, it is no longer compared to its resemblance and non-appearance, the leaves of the complex and sparse, the branches of the slanting and straight! The rise of literati painting focuses more on the use of brush and ink and performance, Huang Gongwang, Wang Meng, Wu Zhen, and Ni Zan's landscape focuses more on the skills and use of brush and ink, the picture is inscribed with poems, the formation of poetry, calligraphy, painting, sealing into one of the literati painting art programs. At this time, painting was more of an extension of the painter's inner self and a path for emotional outpouring,

as well as a calling card of identity, and less of a true reproduction of nature.



**Bian Jingzhao' s
"Three Friends and
Hundred Birds scroll**



**Lu Ji' s
"Gui Ju Mountain
Fowl"**



**Lin Liang' s
"Mountain Tea with
White Feathers"**

Figure 3: Masterpieces of Ming Dynasty Palace Painting

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After the end of the Yuan Dynasty, Ming court painting re-emerged, as shown in Figure 3, with the flower and bird artist Bian Jingzhao's Three Friends and a Hundred Birds scroll and Hundred Happiness scroll, and Lin Liang's Shrubs and Birds, Camellia and White Feathers, and Double Eagles. Lin Liang's "use of calligraphy in painting" resonates throughout the painting world, he is the court painter who introduced cursive writing into painting, however, his focus is on the application of ink and wash rather than the extension of the intention, from the "Shrubs and Birds" and "Double Eagles", we can see the application of calligraphy and ink method in the picture. Lu Ji's "Gui Ju Mountain Fowl", "Pomegranate Blossom and Two Warblers", "Snowy Plume", "Eider Bathing" and so on, no matter whether they were brushwork or both, all of them vividly reproduced the objects. At this time, the court school of painting to the Song court painting as the clan, but in the brushwork and development, while the Zhejiang School of Landscape emphasized the law, Wen Ao's "Sketching Flowers and butterflies" is relatively realistic. Figure painting, Pochen school Zeng Whale's "Wang Shimin" is now hidden in the Nanjing Museum of the Ming Twelve Portrait Album, the image of realistic, but also exquisite, leaping on the paper. "Qingteng Baiyang's bold, sweeping, vertical and horizontal style of freehand painting, which produced a sound sense of drenching ink, became a distinctive presence at that time.

2.3 Changes and continuity in the Qing Dynasty

In the early Qing Dynasty, the leading artists were undoubtedly the Six Qing Masters, who pursued the ancient language of ink and brushwork and chiaroscuro in landscape painting, focusing their attention on the form of ink and brushwork. The most representative of the Qing art style is undoubtedly the "Four Monks", the "Eight Monsters of Yangzhou", the "Three Sea Masters" and Wu Changshuo, as shown in Figure 4. The "Four Monks" emphasized the calligraphic personality and the fun of ink and brushwork, and the ink and brushwork were mostly simple and sparse. Shi Tao's *Ink and Lotus*, Bada Shanren's *Lotus and Stone Waterfowl*, Kunwu's *Cangcui Lingtian*, and Hongren's *Mount Huangshan* are all reflective of this sparse style of painting. Zheng Xie, one of the "Eight Monsters of Yangzhou", used orchids and bamboo as his subjects, and put forward the artistic idea of "bamboo in the eyes, bamboo in the chest, and bamboo in the hands". Hua Yan's bird and flower paintings also focus on the expression of the writing. Yu Jianhua pointed out in his "History of Chinese Painting" that "the literati paintings are based on chiaroscuro, with the method of writing, with the pen and ink interest for the high and elegant, and with the simplicity and simplicity for the subtle."

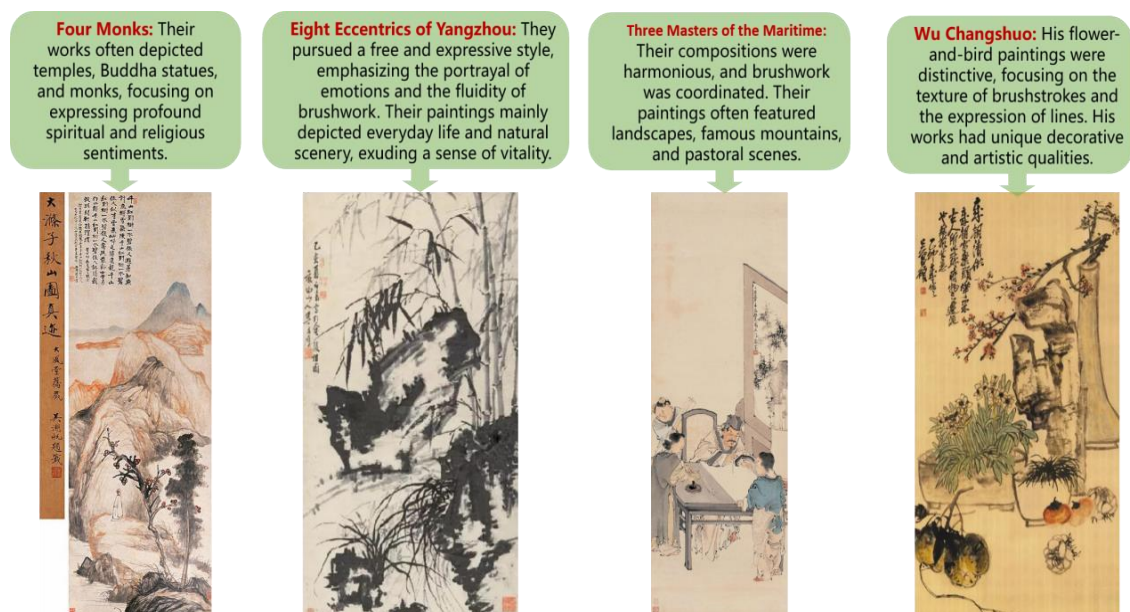


Figure 4: Representative Painters and Works of the Qing Dynasty

The realm is born outside the image, and the realm outside the image, the image outside the image is also the road that the painter must take. Yu Jianhua once pointed out: "Western painting in the future will not be the only one for the Chinese art world's favorite, and Chinese painting will also come back, not forever for the Chinese art world's outcasts, but the length of time can not be certain, at that time the old painters have no new

painters have not been, green and yellow do not come together, the Chinese painting is not very dangerous! Although I can't have the ability to do so, I can't help but have the will to do so."

3. FOLKLORE MEMORY AND CHINESE PAINTING IMAGERY

3.1 Representation of Folklore Elements in Painting Imagery

First of all, Chinese folk culture has gone through thousands of years of epochal changes, both in ancient times and in modern times. Although material civilization has been gradually forgotten with time, folk culture has gone through the baptism of time, taking the essence and removing the dregs, and with the change of times, folk culture has taken on new meanings, and the philosophical ideas it generates have also influenced China's national art.⁴ As a major element of national art, Chinese painting is born from folk culture and is above it. As the main element of national art, Chinese painting arises from and is higher than folk culture.

Secondly, the richness of folk culture has given Chinese painting sufficient materials and creative inspirations, and in the development history of Chinese painting, the position of folk culture is very important. In the history of Chinese painting, folk culture has played an important role in the development of Chinese painting. Moreover, the creative forms of Chinese painting include calligraphy and carving, etc., which are the peculiar techniques of these national arts and expand the expression space of Chinese painting. Chinese painting requires painters to have a high level of cultural literacy and knowledge to create works in line with the characteristics of Chinese culture. Among them, folk culture is the foundation of Chinese painting. If Chinese painting leaves folk culture, it will lose this foundation and become a source of no water and a rootless wood. Folk culture mainly refers to the culture spontaneously formed in the life of some specific groups in the background of a certain era and is the common tradition of a certain group. Folk culture is constituted by a certain structure, and the characteristics of this structure represent the symbolism of folk culture and become the important characteristics of folk culture. This feature can be traced back to the era of primitive civilization, for example, the totem worship and primitive murals in the era of primitive civilization. The primitive inhabitants had strong beliefs, feared heaven and the gods, and derived the fantasy concept of "everything has a spirit". Through this fantasy, all the phenomena in nature and society are explained, and the development of primitive art is also a folk product of

the times derived from the fantasy of "all things have spirits". The inhabitants of the society at that time depicted the images of all things in nature through drawings to express their worship of the "all spirits" and the gods in heaven, and to obtain solace in their lives and souls".

Chinese painting is derived from primitive drawings and has the same origin as folk culture. During the Qin and Han Dynasties, Chinese painting realized a deep integration with the philosophy of "the unity of heaven and mankind", and Chinese painting itself needed to take on the function of recording history and educating the people in the society, which to a certain extent could show the imperial ideology of that time as well as the will of the regime with the characteristics of the era. During this period, the creation of Chinese paintings had a very profound background of the times and the official background and was mainly public. After the Tang and Song dynasties, the literati began to gradually participate in the creation of Chinese paintings as an important vehicle for daily recreation and enjoyment, and since then, the social and public functions of Chinese paintings have become weaker and weaker, and have gradually evolved into individual behaviors in cultural dissemination. In modern times, such masters as Huang Han and Yang Zhiguang created a large number of monumental works reflecting China's national folk culture, as shown in Figure 5.



"Myanmar Dancer"
Contemporary/Yang Zhiguang



"Song And Dance Of Xinjiang"
Contemporary/Huang Zhou

Figure 5: Paintings Reflecting Chinese Ethnic Folk Culture

(<https://www.artbanx.io/artworks/song-and-dance-of-xinjiang-28f5e88c-cd14-4c5a-86f9-22b1a3ecb2f1/>)

(<https://www.art.salon/artwork/yang-zhiguang-myanmar-dancer-AID454646>)

Essentially, the cultural backgrounds of folk culture and Chinese painting are highly similar, but the difference lies in that folk culture is a

kind of unique cultural form derived from people's comprehensive life experience and customary behaviors in daily life, with a very profound life atmosphere and unique national colors.

Chinese painting has always been an accessory to the mainstream culture in history, with certain functions of indoctrination, cultural propaganda, aesthetic enhancement, and spirituality, as an external manifestation of the ancient spiritual culture, corresponding to the "elegance" of the folk culture. No matter what form it takes, it is an important carrier of traditional Chinese culture and an important component of the spiritual civilization of the Chinese nation.

3.2 Modern Transformation of Folk Culture in Chinese Painting

At the present stage, the creative trend of Chinese paintings is good, and many good works have emerged. Among them, the most used subjects are folk customs and folklife.

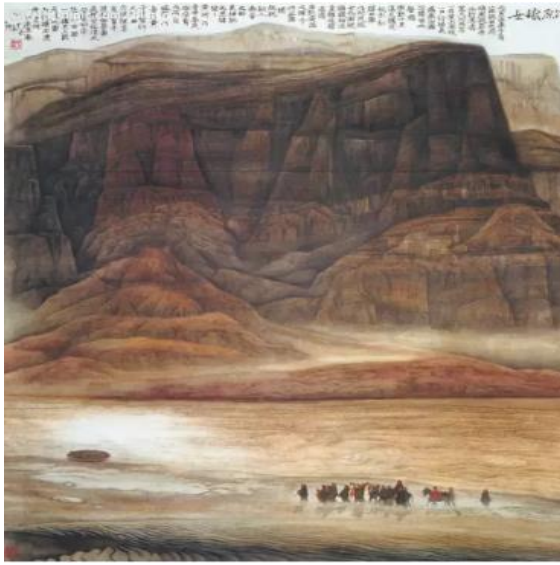
However, some creators do not grasp the unique charm of folk elements in the process of creation, but cater to the market, and are detached from life. Because the responsibility of folk cultural value that should be assumed in the works has not been effectively presented, there are defects in theory and expression. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the research and utilization of folk elements in Chinese painting.

At present, art creators are very fond of paintings with folk elements, and they put a lot of energy into the creative process to express their cultural ideals through the specific depiction of the painting objects. Painters attach great importance to painting, while artists pay more attention to unique art, and the development of Chinese painting with folk elements lacks systematic research whether in theory or development, and monographs are even less.

And the specific actual creation also needs specialized knowledge to guide, there is no foreseeable research, but through painting to depict their confused thoughts. In the art world, there has always existed the view that theory is light and practice is important, emphasizing technique over thought. Creation is more focused on innovation and techniques in composition, but the specialized knowledge system of painting creation is more needed to cover aspects such as personal emotional attachment and characteristics of paintings.

In the author's opinion, in the process of creation, it is necessary to review and summarize, consider the future development direction of folk culture, and become the foundation of professional knowledge of folklore painting through practical exploration, to form a systematic thought to

guide the practice of art.



Comprising a distant view, a near view, and a middle view, seamlessly integrated.

The overall color palette of the painting is cool, exuding a tranquil and desolate ambiance.

The picturesque landscape of the frontier leaves viewers enraptured and longing for it.

Figure 6: "The Ancient Camel Bells of the Plateau" by Li Ying

(http://www.360doc.com/content/22/0308/08/30535600_1020570026.shtml)

Of course, the modern transformation or break of art forms should not be focused entirely on external forces, such as social revolution, Western art influence, and other factors, but should respect the law of art's development.

After all, modern Chinese art in the 20th century is very different from that of the West, the main path is the introduction of realistic academies, supplemented by public exhibitions and media publications, in addition to the artistic function of aesthetic education and enlightenment, it also helps the revolution, salvation and other tasks of the times, and even serves the situation of the policy of the time and the place to play a role of public opinions, such as the propaganda of the war of resistance, praise for the workers, peasants, and soldiers, expose the darkness of the Nationalist Region, and celebrate the construction of a new China. construction, the interaction between artistic creation and social relations is significantly strengthened, and the influence is wider.

For example, Li Ying's *The Ancient Camel Bells of the Plateau*, shown in Figure 6, not only has the dimensions of a large Western oil painting but is also realistic and appropriately proportioned. The snowy mountains, the Great Wall, and the camel caravan under the moonlight are covered in the overall indigo color, which has a real and full poetic feeling, completely different from the traditional landscape paintings in terms of the region, season, and objects in the general meaning of the performance, but showing a certain modernity.

China's modern art can also be said to be from art revolution to revolutionary art, from popularization to popularization, and its basic characteristics are conception of the world, positive content, realistic techniques, novel forms, easy to understand, and mass dissemination, etc. The modernization and transformation of society is very complicated, and the times are very different.

The modernization and transformation of society are very complex, and factors such as technological progress, economic model changes, and foreign cultural exchanges will all form a certain trend of the times and subtly affect the slow and gradual modern transformation of the painting industry.

Needless to say, the transformation of modernity in Chinese society is secondary, one of the tides of globalization in which we are forced to be involved or actively integrated, but in the process of unfolding, especially in culture and art, it has always been accompanied by deep dilemmas and paradoxes: calling for the affirmation of modernity while at the same time questioning and rebelling against it.

4. DEVELOPMENT AND INNOVATION: MODERN INTERPRETATION OF HISTORICAL THEMES

4.1 Overview of modern and contemporary historical works

In the first half of the 20th century, along with the academic trend of "Western learning in the East", many people went out of the country to seek the truth of salvation and survival, and the great changes in society led to the enlightenment of new ideas. "Since the May Fourth New Culture Movement, a wave of "fusion of East and West" has also arisen in the field of art.

During this period, the sketching and modeling techniques of Western realistic painting were gradually integrated into Chinese figure painting, which greatly changed the face of traditional Chinese figure painting, and also gradually changed the original meaning of historical painting, and created a craze for historical painting and figure painting as the subject matter.

Mr. Xu Beihong is the initiator of Chinese historical painting, he combined the Western realistic painting style with the traditional Chinese ink and brush language of thousands of years and put forward the academic point of view that "drawing is the foundation of all the plastic arts", which is of great significance.

Mr. Xu Beihong's choice of subjects and themes for his Chinese figure paintings is more inclined to those related to history. His Chinese paintings "Yugong Yishan", "Jufanggao", and "Bole Xiangma" and oil paintings "Tian Heng and the Five Hundred Followers", "Awaiting the Deliverer" and other works, as shown in Figure 7.

Xu Beihong's works use Western realism and traditional Chinese ink and brushwork to deeply express and portray major historical allusions and historical figures, which profoundly reflect Mr. Xu Beihong's strong dissatisfaction with reality, his deep care for outstanding talents, and his vigorous promotion of the national spirit.



Figure 7: Representative Paintings by Xu Beihong

In 1949, the establishment of a new social system in China, aiming at socialism and communism, led to simultaneous and profound changes in literature and art. However China in this period was being isolated by imperialism.

The post-World War II Western capitalist countries were gradually shifting to the modernism of free expression and personal expression; China was shielded from Western modernism by its position, and Western cultural centrism would not face up to Chinese culture, so China could only look to the Soviet model to explore a whole new artistic path for the masses.

At this time, Soviet literature and art largely influenced the way China created figure painting. In Soviet literature, the most fundamental principle was socialist realism, which meant that artists had to create concrete, realistic works based on the real course of revolutionary development. Therefore, the theory of Chinese literature and art also followed this principle, using real political events as the background to create real and healthy images of the working people. In addition, when judging the excellence of the\ new Chinese figure paintings, people would also use the criterion of whether or not the art form was to the liking of the general public.

However, socialist realism inevitably shows life as too ideal and beautiful, while most of the lower-class people are still in a state of poverty, which goes against the direction and essence of the future development of realist creation. In this way, the spirit of realism, in which the painters think independently and face life directly, will slowly dissolve.

Most of the modern historical paintings on the subject of the democratic revolution utilize traditional Chinese painting techniques, while most of them are still in the hands of young painters who have mastered realistic techniques. Figure 8 shows some unique expressive works of modern Chinese painting. Ye Qianyu's "The Liberation of Beiping" depicted the jubilant atmosphere during the liberation of Beiping with meticulous lines and vibrant colors.

Chen Dongting's "Liberation of Guangzhou" employed concise Xin'an-style brushwork. Most works, such as Li Hu's "Guangzhou Uprising," Yang Zhiguang's "Chairman Mao at Guangzhou Peasant Movement Institute", and Mei Xiaqing's "Traversing a Thousand Miles of Snow on the Plateau," ingeniously integrated Western plastic techniques to reveal the potential of Chinese painting in portraying significant historical themes. Chinese painting was fully capable of serving political purposes. Two works stood out: Shi Lu's "Campaigning in Northern Shaanxi" blended Mao Zedong's sculptural back profile with the vigorous strokes of the loess plateau, subtly hinting at the guerrilla warfare concept and marking a new artistic height in the technique of new national painting. Wang Shenglou's "Eight Female Martyrs" was also exemplary of this period. This piece portrayed the heroic battle poses of eight female soldiers as they valiantly threw themselves into the river, resonating with the surrounding atmosphere of clouds and water. It became a model of Chinese figure painting depicting major historical themes.



Figure 8: Some unique expressive works in the modern Chinese painting circle

4.2 New Expressions in Contemporary Chinese Painting

The spiritual factor embedded in the works is the core of the creation of Chinese figure paintings of major historical themes and the soul of the works. In the glorious history of the Chinese nation, there have emerged many extraordinary great figures and singable heroes, who have struggled hard and forged an incomparably brilliant history of national development. It can be said that countless outstanding sons and daughters of the Chinese nation have gone before and after, fought in blood, and composed a magnificent national epic with their industriousness, wisdom, bravery, and kindness.

The Chinese nation has gradually formed a national spirit centered on patriotism in thousands of years of historical development. It is with the national spirit that the Chinese nation has been able to survive and stand firmly in the forest of the world's nations. The core of the creation of Chinese figure paintings with major historical themes is to express the great spirit of the Chinese nation and eulogize the heroes of the times in a unique form of art, which can make the appreciators produce an inner spiritual power, therefore, the most important feature of the creation of Chinese figure paintings with major historical themes is the reflection of the national spirit. The planar character of traditional Chinese painting does not mean that Chinese painters have established a subjective system of

constitutive formal language. The study of Western constitutive language in contemporary Chinese painting is, in its essence, a question of how traditional painting can connect with the concepts of the times and the spirit of the times of industrial civilization, scientific and technological civilization, and digital civilization in terms of the mode of expression, and how to establish an effective discourse system of expression of the times. It is the question of how to establish an effective discourse system for the expression of the times.

At the beginning of the 20th century, painters represented by Lin Fengmian conducted in-depth research and study of Western Cubism. While retaining the figurative characteristics of Chinese painting, they focused on the application of vaporous structures, which was a breakthrough in the form of Chinese painting after a long time of exploring realistic techniques, as well as a major attempt at contemporary Chinese painting.

It can be said that the creative language of modern Chinese oil painting no longer develops in the direction of geometrical abstraction; on the contrary, it integrates the concept of geometrical composition with the expression of image, imagery, and mood. In many cases, its compositions are often abstracted, while the expressed content is authentic. Such a combination is rarely seen in Western painting, and it is considered the most important factor in the expression of modernity in Chinese painting. It is an innovation to the structural language of Western painting, gradually forming a complete language system of its own.

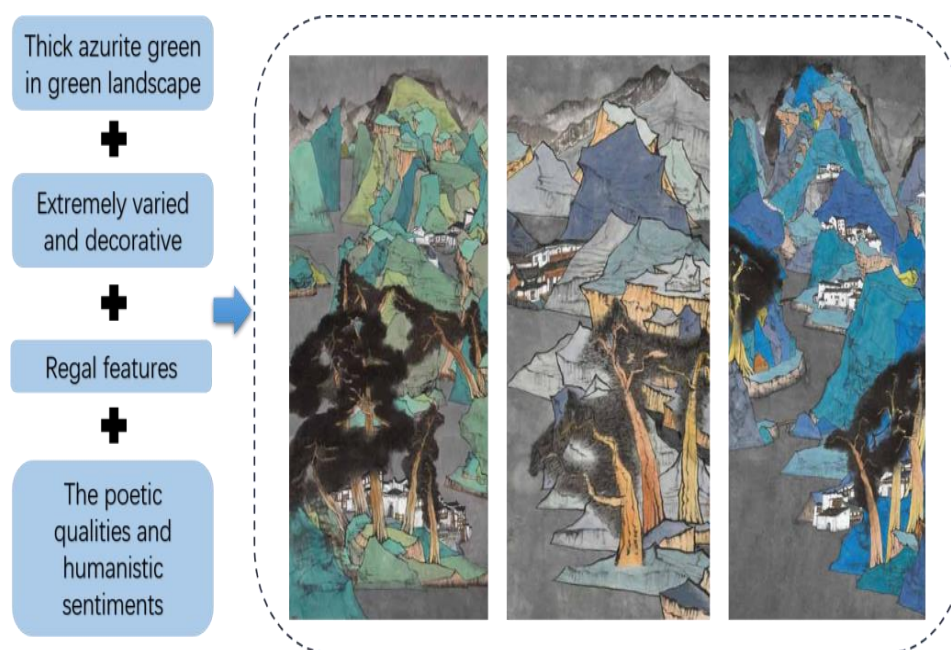


Figure 9: Zeng Junyi's "Colorful Realm" Series

The compositional consciousness of young painter Zeng Junyi's superimposed landscape works is very obvious, as shown in Figure 9. In Zeng Junyi's green landscapes, there is not only the inheritance of tradition but also his thinking about the contemporary transformation of traditional Chinese painting. In his works, one can see both the heavy stone green and stone green, extremely varied and decorative, and opulent features of green landscapes, as well as the poetic qualities and humanistic feelings of traditional landscape painting. Using the line as the bone, superimposed with color, combining objectivity and subjectivity, the objective rocks, trees, houses, etc. are subjectively summarized into various sizes and irregular geometric color blocks, which are separated by dynamic and powerful lines, and then stacked and flattened, sporadic and sparsely ordered. Thus, the traditional techniques of landscape painting, such as ink blotting and chapping, the strong lines, and the bold use of traditional stone colors, are in harmony with the traditional language of Western painting.

The traditional language of Chinese painting, such as the use of ink and dabbing, the strong lines, the bold use of traditional stone colors, and the Western modernist deconstruction and reorganization of the compositional language of expression interact with each other to achieve a very tense visual effect in the simplest form, resulting in decorative planar space, while still being able to achieve a sense of the depth of the traditional landscape painting.

5. CONCLUSION

This thesis draws the following conclusions through the study of the historical inheritance of imagery in Chinese painting, the relationship between folklore memory and imagery in Chinese painting, and the modern interpretation of modern historical themes in Chinese painting: The historical inheritance of Chinese painting imagery is a multi-layered and diversified process, which includes not only the evolution of techniques and styles but also the inheritance of cultural, historical, and social concepts. The development of Chinese painting imagery cannot be separated from the respect for tradition and the integration of innovation, which enables Chinese painting imagery to maintain its uniqueness in different periods and cultural contexts. Folk culture plays an important role in the imagery of Chinese paintings, and the expression of folk elements not only enriches the content of the paintings but also conveys deeper messages of culture and history. By reinterpreting and expressing

traditional folk elements, contemporary artists have injected new vitality into the imagery of Chinese paintings, enabling them to relate and dialog with modern society. The modern interpretation of modern historical themes in Chinese painting demonstrates the vitality and adaptability of Chinese painting. Artists use new modes of expression and visual language to present historical memories and social changes to the audience more intuitively and profoundly. This reflects the continuous evolution and innovation of Chinese painting imagery in the face of social change and historical challenges. In conclusion, Chinese painting imagery, as a precious heritage of Chinese culture, continues to evolve and develop. Through historical inheritance, folkloric memory, and modern interpretation, it continues to play an important role in contemporary art, providing viewers with rich cultural experiences and opportunities for historical reflection. These findings help us to better understand the diversity and complexity of Chinese painting imagery and its importance in contemporary society.

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