

Explore the Potential and Practice of Painting in Promoting Cultural and Value Exchanges in Social Changes

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Abstract: Art painting transcends time and space and serves as a universal language, wielding significant influence across cultures and eras, from the East to the West, and throughout history. Our mixed methods study explored the potential of painting to bridge cultures, promote value exchange, and contribute to social changes. The research, conducted at the School of Chinese Painting at the China Academy of Art, involved interviews with participants and a survey to gather both qualitative and quantitative data. The analysis revealed several key themes. First, participants emphasized the power of paintings as a universal language. Emotional connection, shared humanity, and symbolic language were identified as subthemes, highlighting how paintings transcend cultural barriers and resonate with viewers on a deeper level. Second, the study explored the role of paintings in historical narratives and cultural identity. Paintings serve as historical documents, allowing us to connect with and learn from past cultures. They can also challenge stereotypes and promote cultural exchange by sparking curiosity and interest in different cultures. Our study suggests that paintings play a significant role in promoting cultural understanding, fostering empathy, and inspiring social change in our increasingly interconnected world.

Keywords: Art Painting, China, Social Values, Cultural Values and Cultures

1. INTRODUCTION

Multiculturalism thrives on the vibrant mix of cultures coexisting within a society. It celebrates the unique richness and contributions that each cultural background brings (Guha, 2024). Art acts as a bridge, bypassing language barriers to connect us through emotions that resonate universally. It plays a crucial role in fostering understanding and appreciation of multiculturalism. Artists offer us a window into the lives, struggles, and triumphs of various cultural communities. Their paintings, sculptures, photographs, and other creations become visual stories, depicting scenes, symbols, and narratives that reflect the vibrant multicultural fabric of society (Al-Zadjali, 2024; Delacruz, 1995). The emergence of art exhibitions during the Republic of China era (1912-1949) marked a pivotal shift in the presentation and appreciation of Chinese art (Zhao, 2021). Prior to this period, traditional Chinese paintings primarily resided within private

collections, accessible only to a select group of scholars and literati. The introduction of Western-style art exhibitions ushered in a new era of public display for Chinese art (Jiang, 2024). This novel format challenged the established patterns of visual experience and appreciation for paintings, potentially even disrupting the inherent values and expressions traditionally associated with Chinese painting. This development necessitates in-depth research to fully understand the impact of art exhibitions on the trajectory of Chinese art. Furthermore, the public and social nature of art exhibitions fosters a unique opportunity for art to connect with a broader audience. This accessibility facilitates the dissemination of aesthetic education and potentially elevates the nation's overall artistic appreciation. Ultimately, art exhibitions can serve the purpose of cultivating public sentiment and enriching the cultural landscape of society. In contemporary political discourse, multiculturalism has emerged as a central concept for grappling with the complexities of cultural diversity (Song et al., 2020). It signifies the recognition and celebration of multiple cultural groups coexisting within a society. This philosophy actively promotes cultural variety while fostering tolerance and understanding between individuals from different backgrounds. Artistic expression plays a critical role in this context, serving as a powerful tool for exploring and appreciating cultural identity. Through diverse creative forms, multicultural societies can effectively showcase their unique origins, customs, and perspectives, ultimately enriching the collective experience. In the evolving landscape of the 21st century, "cultural self-confidence" is poised to become a critical issue for nations navigating the path of social development (Lai et al., 2016). This concept encompasses a nation's ability to accurately recognize its own cultural heritage and explore its relationship with other cultures. Such an understanding is vital for maintaining a balanced global cultural ecosystem. Cultural "soft power," the influence a nation's culture exerts internationally, is increasingly recognized as a key factor in national development and revitalization. This power is not solely dependent on economic might or political systems, but also on the confidence a nation's citizens have in their own cultural heritage (Lai et al., 2016; Wang & Cai, 2019). Modern Chinese painting serves as a significant reflection of this cultural self-confidence. Its development not only mirrors the nation's historical triumphs and struggles, but also reveals the evolving attitudes of the Chinese people towards foreign cultures and their own artistic traditions. Examining the evolution of modern Chinese painting can contribute to strengthening cultural understanding among students, fostering national cultural self-confidence, and promoting the appreciation of values embedded within

this artistic movement. As the impact of new social and philosophical currents shapes the value and development of modern Chinese painting, the concept of cultural self-confidence offers a valuable lens through which to explore its significance within the broader context of Chinese culture (Azzopardi & McNeill, 2016). According to Kaski et al, building rapport and effectiveness in another culture hinges on a genuine interest in its traditions and practices (Kaski et al., 2018). This intercultural competency requires perceptiveness to identify cultural differences and a willingness to adapt behaviour as a sign of respect. These core principles extend beyond everyday interactions and can be applied by artisans and folk artists as well. By cultivating an awareness of cultural diversity, these artists can broaden their creative horizons and cater to a wider range of client preferences. Chinese painting has endured as a vibrant art form with a rich history stretching back to prehistoric murals and painted pottery (Wang et al., 2016). Chinese painting has navigated various historical shifts. Today, China finds itself in a period of rapid transformation, transitioning from an agrarian society to a science and technology-driven era within a remarkably short timeframe. The ever-evolving information age adds another layer of complexity. This swift and dramatic change has arguably led to a sense of disorientation in the Chinese art world, with some questioning the goals and pace of artistic development (Wang & Cai, 2019). The process of urbanization has also introduced a disconnect between individuals and their cultural roots, potentially leading to a decline in artistic expressions that contemplate the deeper aspects of life and humanity's connection with nature. Furthermore, some contemporary artists have fallen into the trap of uncritical imitation, either copying Western styles or merely replicating the mannerisms of past Chinese masters (Qian & Yin, 2017; Shin et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2016). These trends pose significant concerns for the future trajectory of Chinese painting. Scholar-officials have long been central figures in the tradition of Chinese painting, wielding brush and ink on paper and silk to create enduring works of art. Deeply influenced by the philosophies of Confucianism and Taoism, these scholar-artists established a rich artistic heritage that continues to resonate in modern Chinese painting (von Falkenhausen, 2016). According to (Wang & Cai, 2019), Chinese modern painting is shaped by the relentless efforts of its artists, and embodies three key characteristics. Firstly, it reflects the tumultuous social transformations that China underwent, integrating political upheaval, military struggles, and societal development into its content, genres, concepts, and techniques. This deep engagement with the social fabric of the times distinguishes modern Chinese painting. Secondly, it demonstrates

a profound influence from Western aesthetics, painting techniques, and artistic concepts. This influence has fostered a trend of diversification and integration within the art form. Finally, modern Chinese painting exhibits a tension between a strong inheritance of traditional styles and a drive for innovation. This ongoing exploration of new techniques, ideas, and values reflects the ongoing development and search for a unique identity within the broader context of Chinese art. According to Desplanches in response to mounting pressure from Western powers in the late Qing dynasty (1644-1912), the government undertook a series of reforms aimed at strengthening its position (Desplanches, 2020). This "Self-Strengthening Movement" emphasized the adoption of Western technological advancements, military modernization, and the development of national initiatives to bolster China's economic and military might. Fuelled by this desire for modernization, a growing number of intellectuals travelled abroad to immerse themselves in Western culture (Jiang, 2024). It was within this context that the concept of modern art exhibitions was introduced to China. In 1876, Wang Tao, documented his visit to the Louvre Museum in France and the British Museum in England. Notably, his writings, titled "Recording and Traveling," referred to the organization of a "painting fair" at the British Museum, marking the first appearance of the term "art exhibition" within the Chinese art and cultural discourse. Modern art exhibitions characterized by their public nature and strong social engagement, represent a significant shift in the appreciation of traditional Chinese art (Lu, 2017). Their emergence democratized art appreciation, dismantling the elitist privilege of the upper class. Previously confined to the confines of literati studies, paintings were now accessible to the public, allowing for a broader societal recognition of the social value inherent in artistic creation (Clarke, 2019; Huber & Chuan, 2011). As products of the specific social, historical, and cultural context of the Republic of China era (1912-1949), art exhibitions became imbued with rich social, historical, cultural, and artistic significance. This rise in public art exhibitions marked a pivotal transition, transforming Chinese art culture from a closed system to one embracing openness and enlightenment. Consequently, these exhibitions served a dual purpose: providing aesthetic education for the public and fostering a greater sense of societal integration. This development holds immense significance within the broader narrative of Chinese art history

1.1 Rationale and Objective

Chinese painting with its rich history and symbolic language, has served

as a powerful medium for reflecting cultural values and fostering a connection with nature. However, the rise of globalization and social change necessitates a re-evaluation of the role painting can play in today's world. This study investigates the potential of painting to bridge cultures, promote value exchange, and contribute meaningfully to the ongoing social transformations shaping our societies.

2. METHODS

2.1 Study Design

Our study adopted a mixed methods approach to explore the potential and practice of painting in promoting cultural and value exchanges in social changes. The research was conducted at the China Academy of Art (CAA), School of Chinese Painting, where 42 participants were randomly recruited from the student body. The Department of Chinese Painting provided a targeted population with a strong foundation in Chinese painting theory and practice. This background knowledge was deemed essential for participants to engage meaningfully with the research questions regarding the role of painting in cultural and value exchange. All procedures adhered to the ethical guidelines set forth by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Prior to participation, written informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring their anonymity and confidentiality throughout the study.

2.2 Qualitative Data Collection

The qualitative phase of our study employed semi-structured interviews to gather in-depth insights from participants. Data collection spanned two months, from January to February 2024. The interview guide comprised 15 open-ended questions, designed to prompt participants' reflections on the potential of painting to bridge cultures, promote value exchange, and contribute to social change. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and was audio-recorded with participant consent. To capture a diverse range of perspectives, we conducted interviews within 9-10 focus groups, ensuring a balance of age, gender, and artistic experience within each group. For the interview discussions, we utilized two distinct case studies representing different styles of Chinese painting: In landscape painting, we explored a prominent contemporary landscape painting that depicted a rapidly developing urban environment. This case study aimed to generate discussion about the role of painting in reflecting and

potentially critiquing social change. In contrast, in portrait painting case study focused on a historical portrait depicting a figure associated with a specific social movement. This case study served to prompt discussion about how painting can preserve cultural memory and inspire social change through historical representation.

2.3 Survey

In the second phase of the study, following the qualitative data collection phase, a quantitative survey was administered in February 2024 to complement the interview findings. The online survey consisted of 12 closed-ended and Likert-scale questions designed to assess participants' perceptions of the role painting plays in cultural exchange and social change. The survey took approximately 15 minutes to complete and was distributed to all 42 participants who had previously participated in the qualitative interviews. Of the distributed surveys, 38 complete responses were received, resulting in a response rate of approximately 90%. The survey data contained details about demographics of the participant pool, their prior exposure to cultural exchange through art, and their perspectives on the impact of paintings on social issues and understanding of different cultures.

2.4 Data Analysis

All the data were obtained and pre-processed in MS Excel before subsequent quantitative analysis in GraphPad Prism version 9.5.1 at a statistical significance of 5% ($p < .05$). In quantitative analyses we obtained descriptive statistics involving means, standard deviations, frequencies and percentages. Inferential statistics involved correlation tests between confounding variables. Qualitative analysis involved techniques coding and thematic analysis and the data were presented in tables alongside anonymous quotes where possible.

3. RESULTS

The study surveyed a total of 38 participants. The survey results revealed a diverse range of participants in terms of age, gender, and painting experience. Among the 38 respondents, the majority fell within the 20-24 age range ($N = 22$, 57.90%), followed by 16–19-year-olds ($N = 8$, 21.10%) and those 25 and above ($N = 8$, 21.10%). In terms of gender, females made up a larger portion of the group with 23 participants (60.50%) compared

to males (N = 15, 39.50%).

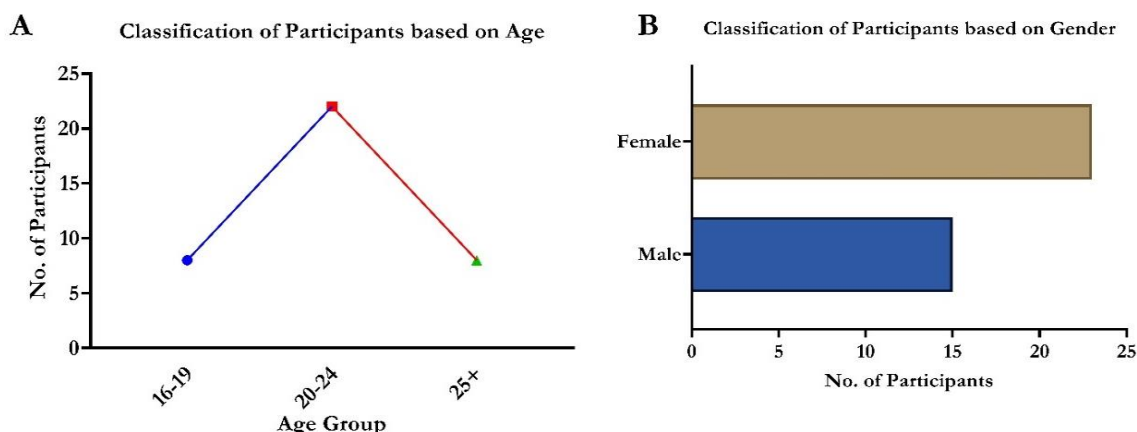


Figure 1: Analysis and classification of participant demographics based on age categories (A) and gender (B).

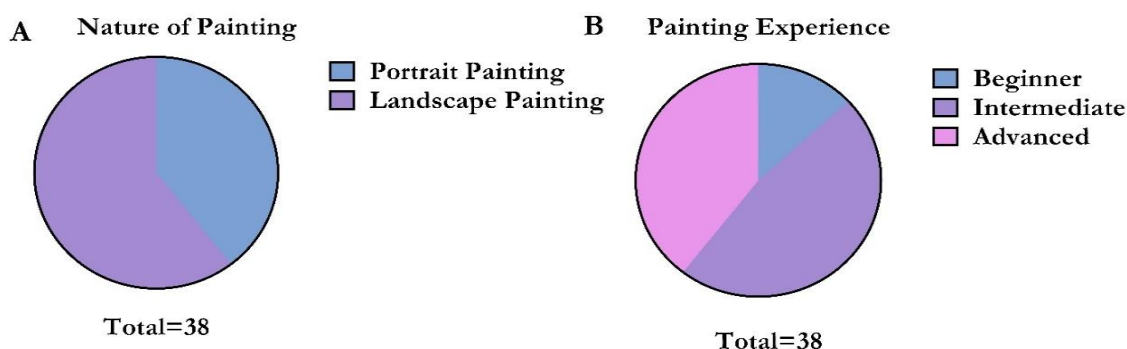


Figure 2: Pie Chart distribution of the participant demographics based on nature of painting (A) and the painting experience (B).

In Figure 2, painting experience varied with 18 participants (47.40%) identifying as intermediate, 15 (39.50%) as advanced, and 5 (13.20%) as beginners. Interestingly, when asked about the nature of painting that resonated most with cultural exchange, landscape paintings emerged as the favourite with 23 participants (60.50%) selecting it, while portrait paintings garnered interest from 15 participants (39.50%).

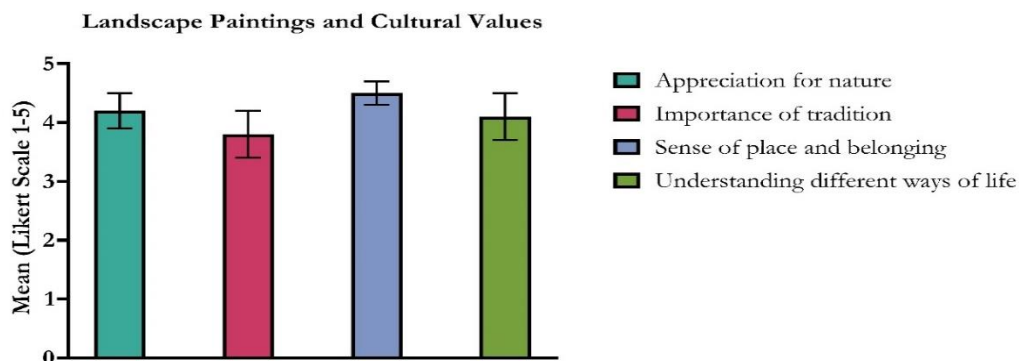


Figure 3: A comparative bar chart showing the Perceptions of Landscape Paintings and Cultural Values

In Figure 3, the survey participants generally agreed on the role of

landscape paintings in promoting cultural values. On a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree), the average scores indicated a positive association between landscape paintings and appreciation for nature ($M = 4.2$, $SD = 0.3$), sense of place and belonging ($M = 4.5$, $SD = 0.2$), and understanding different ways of life ($M = 4.1$, $SD = 0.4$). The importance of tradition received a slightly lower average score ($M = 3.8$, $SD = 0.4$), suggesting a possible perception of landscape paintings as less directly connected to cultural heritage compared to the other values.

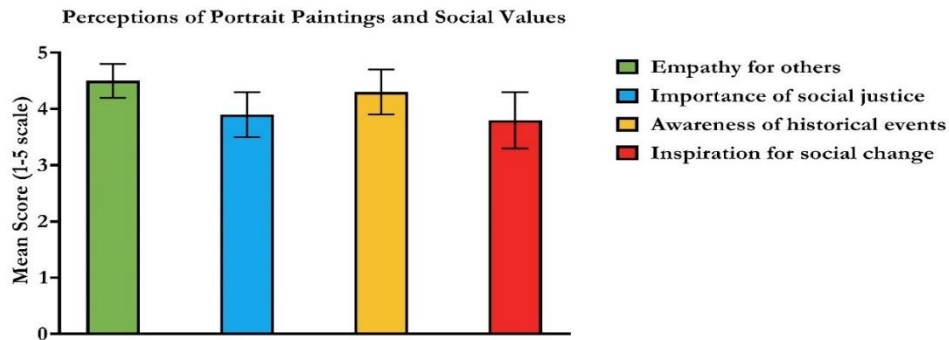


Figure 4: A Comparative Bar Chart Showing Perceptions of Portrait Paintings and Social Values

In Figure 4, survey participants ascribed strong social value to portrait paintings (using a 5-point Likert scale where 1 indicated strong disagreement and 5 strong agreement). Perceptions centered on fostering empathy for others ($M = 4.5$, $SD = 0.3$) and awareness of historical events ($M = 4.3$, $SD = 0.4$). Scores for the importance of social justice ($M = 3.9$, $SD = 0.4$) and inspiration for social change ($M = 3.8$, $SD = 0.5$) were still positive, but slightly lower.

Table 1: Correlation Analysis between Painting Type and Social/Cultural Values

Correlation	Coefficient (R)	P-Value	Interpretation
Landscape Paintings & Appreciation for Nature	0.65	0.01	Positive correlation - Higher appreciation for nature scores associated with landscape paintings.
Portrait Paintings & Empathy for Others	0.72	0.001	Strong positive correlation - Higher empathy scores associated with portrait paintings.

In Table 1, the correlation analysis revealed significant positive relationships between the type of painting and specific values. Landscape paintings exhibited a moderate positive correlation with appreciation for nature ($r = 0.65$, $p = 0.01$), indicating that those who scored higher in appreciating nature also tended to score higher in finding landscape

paintings valuable for cultural exchange. An even stronger positive correlation emerged between portrait paintings and empathy for others ($r = 0.72$, $p = 0.001$). This suggests that participants who valued empathy were more likely to find portrait paintings effective in promoting cultural understanding.

Table 2: Theme 1 of Painting as a Universal Language

Subtheme	Description	Example Quote
Emotional Connection	Paintings transcend language barriers by evoking emotions and experiences that resonate across cultures.	"Looking at this abstract painting, I don't need to understand the artist's culture to feel a sense of peace and tranquillity."
Shared Humanity	Paintings depict the human experience in all its diversity, fostering empathy and understanding between different cultures.	"Seeing a portrait from a different culture reminds me that people everywhere share similar hopes, dreams, and struggles."
Symbolic Language	Artistic symbols and techniques can hold deeper meanings that bridge cultural divides.	"The use of vibrant colours in this landscape painting reminds me of festivals celebrated in my own culture, even though the depicted scenery is unfamiliar."

In Table 2, painting as a Universal Language explores how paintings transcend language barriers. Subthemes include Emotional Connection (e.g., "feeling peace" from abstract art), Shared Humanity (e.g., portraits revealing universal experiences), and Symbolic Language (e.g., vibrant colours sparking cultural connections).

Table 3: Theme 2 of Historical Narratives and Cultural Identity

Subtheme	Description	Example Quote
Preserving Cultural Memory	Paintings serve as historical documents, allowing us to connect with and learn from past cultures.	"Seeing historical paintings helps me understand the traditions and values that shaped my own culture."
Challenging Stereotypes	Paintings can challenge stereotypical views of different cultures by presenting a more nuanced and complex perspective.	"This painting depicting a bustling marketplace in another country surprised me. It showed a society filled with life and diversity, contrasting with the negative stereotypes I'd heard."
Promoting Cultural Exchange	Paintings can spark curiosity and interest in different cultures, motivating further exploration and understanding.	"After seeing this exhibition of traditional Japanese woodblock prints, I felt inspired to learn more about Japanese art and history."

In Table 3, historical narratives and cultural identity highlights how

paintings connect us to the past. preserving cultural memory (e.g., "learning traditions from historical paintings") allows us to understand our own heritage. paintings can challenge stereotypes (e.g., "bustling marketplace showing cultural complexity") and spark curiosity, promoting cultural exchange (e.g., "inspired to learn about Japanese art").

Table 4: Theme 3 of Social Commentary and Critique

Subtheme	Description	Example Quote
Raising Awareness of Social Issues	Paintings can depict social injustices and inequalities, raising awareness and prompting critical reflection.	"This painting of a polluted landscape made me think about the environmental challenges faced by many societies around the world."
Sparkling Dialogue	Paintings can be used to initiate conversations about important social issues, fostering collective action.	"Seeing this artwork about the refugee crisis sparked a discussion in my art class about global responsibility."
Inspiring Social Change	Paintings can inspire individuals and communities to work towards a more just and equitable society.	"The powerful imagery in this protest mural motivates me to get involved in social activism efforts in my own community."

In Table 4, social commentary and critique explores the power of paintings to address social issues. Raising Awareness (e.g., "polluted landscape sparking environmental reflection") prompts critical thinking. They can spark dialogue (e.g., "refugee crisis artwork leading to discussions") and inspire social action, motivating individuals to work for change (e.g., "protest mural prompting activism").

Table 5: The Evolving Role of Painting in a Globalized World

Subtheme	Description	Example Quote
Digital Platforms and Accessibility	Online access to paintings expands their reach and fosters cultural exchange on a global scale.	"With virtual museum tours and online exhibitions, paintings from all over the world are now accessible to anyone with an internet connection."
Contemporary Art and Diverse Voices	Contemporary artists from different cultures are using painting to explore themes of globalization and cultural exchange.	"I find it exciting to see how artists today are using traditional techniques to address contemporary social issues relevant to a global audience."
The Future of Painting	Paintings remain a powerful tool for intercultural communication and social engagement in our increasingly interconnected world.	"Despite the rise of digital media, I believe paintings will continue to play a vital role in fostering understanding and empathy between cultures."

In Table 5, the *Evolving Role of Painting in a Globalized World* examines how paintings adapt to our connected world. Digital Platforms (e.g., "online museum tours") increase accessibility, while Contemporary Art (e.g., "exploring globalization themes") uses tradition to address modern issues. Despite digital media, paintings remain a powerful tool for intercultural communication (e.g., "fostering empathy").

4. DISCUSSION

Our findings revealed that participants viewed paintings as a universal language capable of transcending cultural barriers through emotional connection, shared humanity, and symbolic language. Paintings were also seen as valuable tools for preserving cultural memory, challenging stereotypes, and promoting cultural exchange through historical narratives and cultural identity. Previous studies (Chen et al., 2021; Yuping, 2016) have alluded that traditional Chinese landscape painting theory emphasizes a deep empathy for all aspects of nature, underlining the interconnectedness between humans and their environment. One possible case study of this philosophy is exemplified in the work of Northern Song Dynasty painter Fan Kuan. His masterpiece, "Travelers Among Mountains and Streams," utilizes a panoramic composition with a monumental presence. The imposing Qinling and Longshan mountains are rendered in simple yet elegant dark ink, capturing the majesty of the rugged northern landscape with authenticity (Diep, 2017). Upon unfolding the scroll, the viewer encounters a scene bustling with activity. A string of traders and laden pack animals traverse a mountain path near secluded springs. The imagery evokes the sounds of gurgling water, the murmur of human voices, and the grunts of the mules, transporting the viewer into the heart of this vibrant scene. The rise of the May Fourth Movement (1919) ushered in a wave of scientific and revolutionary ideals. This period also witnessed a surge of Western cultural influence that significantly impacted traditional Chinese painting. In response, a movement emerged to safeguard the legacy of Chinese painting. Art societies dedicated to this cause were established, focusing on preserving and promoting traditional styles. One such prominent organization was the "Chinese Painting Research Institute," founded in 1920 with the stated mission of "studying ancient methods and acquiring new knowledge" (Zhong & Hu, 2023). Furthermore, collaborative efforts with Japan materialized in the form of multiple "Sino-Japanese Painting Exhibitions." (Zhong & Hu, 2023).

Similarly, in 1918, Cai Yuanpei, a leading figure at Peking University, spearheaded the creation of the "Peking University Painting Research Association." This organization aimed to showcase research advancements in traditional Chinese painting. Through events like the "Painting Research Students' Entertainment Conference" and exhibitions organized by the "Chinese Painting Display Society," the Association played a crucial role in solidifying the position of traditional Chinese painting within the evolving landscape of modern Chinese art. Chen et al. and Jiang suggested that China's rich and enduring cultural heritage has served as a fertile ground for the flourishing of various art forms, including Chinese painting and opera (Chen et al., 2018; Jiang, 2007). These artistic expressions possess distinct national characteristics and embody a unique aesthetic sensibility. We propose that Chinese painting is steeped in a long and distinguished history and has developed a singular style through its deep integration with other traditional art forms like calligraphy and seal carving. This artistic form emerges from the very core of Chinese culture, and its techniques – from the evocative brushstrokes ("malapropism" can be replaced with "depicting landscapes with a few suggestive brushstrokes") to the textured effects ("moss") – alongside its philosophical underpinnings (unity between nature and human) all reflect the profound aesthetic values cherished within traditional Chinese culture. Our study highlighted the role of paintings in social commentary and critique. Participants acknowledged the power of paintings to raise awareness of social issues, spark dialogue, and inspire social change. Our findings were aligned with previous studies (Murray, 2007; Yuan et al., 2023; Zhenzhao, 2023) in proposing that early Chinese art served not only aesthetic purposes but also played a crucial role in shaping social and moral values. We allude that ancient texts document the existence of early wall paintings depicting benevolent emperors, wise sages, virtuous officials, and loyal generals alongside their negative counterparts. These served as both examples to emulate and warnings against misconduct for the living. Similarly, portraiture paintings functioned as a moral compass, capturing not just physical likeness but also the character and societal contributions of the subject. In Chinese artistic thought, the act of creation transcended mere skill. It was believed that the artist, through the rhythm and energy of their brushstrokes, could forge a connection with the very source of creative life force, drawing from both earthly and celestial realms, and even the Dao itself (Baihua, 2023; Sullivan, 2023). One plausible explanation is that this philosophy held that both painting and calligraphy possessed the power to rejuvenate or spiritually harm the artist, depending on the integrity of their practice and their own

inner character. Art appreciation followed a similar philosophy. The focus wasn't solely on the painted subject, but also on the artist themselves – their knowledge, moral compass, and the harmonious alignment (or discord) they achieved with the natural world. This deep connection between artist, artwork, and the forces of nature is a defining characteristic of Chinese painting. Early Chinese art transcended its aesthetic purpose and served a significant role in the propitiation of deities and ancestral spirits (Williams, 2012). Archaic bronze vessels, for instance, were meticulously crafted for use in rituals and sacrifices offered to the heavens and clan ancestors. The belief system held that the regularity and proper execution of these rites influenced the well-being of the living. Rooted in an agrarian society, Chinese culture has historically emphasized a deep understanding and harmonious relationship with nature. The natural world was perceived as a reflection of a higher power's workings, governed by the generative interplay of the yin-yang (feminine-masculine) duality. This emphasis on nature's interconnectedness is mirrored in the evolution of Chinese art. Over time, the purpose of art shifted from propitiation and sacrifice towards expressing human comprehension of these forces. This is particularly exemplified in landscape paintings featuring elements like bamboo, birds, and flowers. Our analysis also suggests that paintings are adapting to our globalized world. Digital platforms are expanding accessibility, while contemporary artists are using traditional techniques to address themes of globalization and cultural exchange. According to Foong, court painters in China held a distinct responsibility: to document and commemorate auspicious events and figures (Foong, 2020). It has been postulated that this emphasis on depicting positive and memorable subjects aligns with the ethical and social values of Confucianism. Unlike some cultures, China's artistic tradition has not been heavily influenced by religious iconography. While popular folk religion occasionally inspired artistic creations, it wasn't a major driving force for grand masterpieces. Buddhism, a foreign import, did introduce a unique style of art, but its influence remained separate from the dominant themes in Chinese painting. The centrality of human relationships in Chinese society is vividly reflected in figure paintings. A recurring theme depicts scholars engaged in shared intellectual pursuits, conveying the significance of camaraderie and learning. Another common subject explores the poignant emotions associated with farewells and reunions, a reality for officials whose appointments often necessitated long-distance travel across the vast country. Our analysis proposes that traditional Chinese paintings typically steer clear of depicting war, violence, nudity, death, or martyrdom. The

focus lies on a harmonious relationship with nature, where even rocks and streams are imbued with life, seen as visible manifestations of the universe's unseen forces. Thematic choices prioritized uplifting emotions and moral lessons. Paintings often served to inspire, elevate, admonish, or simply offer a sense of charm and refreshment to the spirit. Traditional Chinese art transcends mere aesthetics, steeped in a culture rich in metaphor and allegory, and with nature as a constant source of inspiration, these paintings are imbued with symbolism. For the Chinese painter, every brushstroke reflects a deeper understanding of a larger whole, intuitively capturing some aspect of this interconnected universe. Unlike artistic traditions that prioritize form over content, Chinese paintings demand a harmonious balance. Beauty alone is not enough; the subject matter must also resonate with the viewer, offering a deeper significance beyond the surface image. Art serves as a universal language that transcends time and space and wields significant influence across cultures and eras, from the East to the West, and throughout history. Art theory encompasses a vast domain, delving into the foundational overviews and definitions of art, while simultaneously exploring its historical context and evolution (Morphy, 2020). Central to the discourse of art theory are the fascinating similarities and divergences between Chinese and Western perspectives (Gao, 2018; Jiang, 2024). These contrasting approaches are deeply rooted in the distinct cultural backgrounds and value systems that underpin each tradition. Discussions within art theory encompass a wide range of topics, including the evolving role of the audience, the artist's creative expression, and the intricate connections between art, society, and the political sphere. The inherent freedom and innovative spirit of artistic expression constantly push the boundaries between tradition and modernity. Furthermore, the ongoing dialogue and collaboration between China and the West enriches the artistic landscape by fostering new interpretations and a sense of complementarity. In our diverse world, art offers a unique space for contemplation and understanding, while simultaneously presenting us with ever-evolving challenges.

5. CONCLUSION

Our study investigated the potential of paintings to bridge cultures, promote value exchange, and contribute to social change. The findings highlight the multifaceted role of paintings as a universal language, historical record, and catalyst for social commentary. Paintings can

transcend language barriers, foster connections to the past, and inspire critical reflection on social issues. The study further emphasizes the evolving role of paintings in a globalized world, with digital platforms expanding accessibility and contemporary artists utilizing tradition to address contemporary themes. However, the study was conducted with a specific participant pool (students at the China Academy of Art) and may not be generalizable to broader populations. Additionally, the interview guide and survey questions could be further refined to capture a deeper understanding of participants' experiences and perceptions. Future research could explore the impact of different painting styles and genres on cultural exchange. Studies could also investigate the effectiveness of using paintings in educational settings to promote intercultural understanding. Furthermore, research on audience demographics beyond art students could provide a more comprehensive picture of how various audiences engage with paintings and their role in social change.

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