

Article

A Study of Imparities between Chinese Painting and Western Painting from Perspectives of Arts and Cultures

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Abstract: In the context of global art history, Chinese and Western painting have developed as two of the most influential artistic traditions, shaped by their unique cultural, philosophical, and historical trajectories. This study examines the disparities between Chinese and Western painting, rooted in their distinct historical evolutions and cultural philosophies. It investigates the materials, tools, artistic purposes, and expressions of space that define these traditions. Chinese painting reflects harmony between nature and humanity, often employing symbolic representation and leaving space for subjective imagination. In contrast, Western painting values realism, with detailed depictions of the natural and human worlds rooted in rational observation. The analysis highlights the influence of Taoist, Confucian, and Buddhist philosophies on Chinese art, while Western painting derives inspiration from religious themes and humanism. By comparing these distinct systems, this study underscores the richness of global artistic diversity and advocates for cultural appreciation and mutual learning.

Keywords: Chinese painting; Western painting; artistic traditions; cultural differences; aesthetic expression

1. Introduction

Chinese painting and Western painting all seek harmony and unity of reality, goodness, and beauty [1]. However, under the huge influence of the arts they pursued and the historical culture they underwent, respectively, Chinese painting and Western painting gradually developed the two outstanding systems in paintings and had a significant impact on the promotion of drawing in the world. Chinese painting also gives blank space to audiences so that audiences can imagine everything they have in their brains with full subjectivity [2]. The differences between the two painting systems are mainly expressed as follows: the different descriptions in the arts and different patterns of thought in the culture.

Paintings between China and Western countries embody the different arts and disparate cultures they owned in various countries, so the two big painting systems formed little by little. Thus, in ancient China, we developed landscape paintings by and by, while in the ancient West, they formed religious paintings or portraits bit by bit. Chinese painting not only shows the appearance of the mountain and water but also expresses the harmonious emotion that painters feel about heaven and the earth where they live through objects they draw on paper [1]. However, Western painting only shows respect for God and attaches to the importance of humans rather than the harmony between nature and humans [3]. As a result, painting systems both in China and West have been formed step by step, which has made great contributions to the development of the art circle in the world.

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2. Introduction of Comparisons and Contrasts on Chinese Painting and Western Painting

2.1. Materials

Chinese painting is also called the Chinese landscape painting [4]. It is not called the landscape paintings but given the name of “mountains-and-waters paintings” (in Chinese, “shan & shui”) because the words “shan & shui” or “jiangshan” in Chinese, represent our motherland in Chinese traditional thoughts. And we also take them as China when we mention these words. We also use “shan & shui” or “jiangshan” to express the glory and give great praise to our motherland, especially for the poets in ancient China. Hence, the materials of Chinese painting come into being, namely, the natural scenery, such as mountains and waters, flowers, insects, rain, birds, and animals.

Western painting is also called religious paintings or portraiture [5]. In ancient Greece, people lived in an open-minded society with beautiful scenery and a simple but rich spiritual life for God. Gods were not above people but existed with people harmoniously. Because they regarded the strongest and the most glorious men or women as their heroes or Gods, painters drew their naked bodies as materials. In the medieval age, with the influence of the power of religious authority, painters chose God, churchman, or church as their major materials to express their respect for God. After the Renaissance, under the impact of humanism, artists paid more attention to human beings, so portraiture was prevalent. Therefore, in traditional Western painting, materials about religion and portraits were chosen.

2.2. Tools

When we mention Chinese painting, we must remember the Four Treasures of the Study: the brush, the Chinese ink, the paper, and the Chinese ink stone [6]. Actually, in ancient China, these tools played an important role in writing and painting. We, Chinese people, also emphasize characters of the expression by the line and structure of writing and painting, which also gives the impression of the features of the nation. The colors of black and white are also the most outstanding traits. Although Chinese painting shows simple colors on the surface, they represent generous and hospitable peculiarities.

When it comes to Western painting, we may think about the various colors in our minds. The best representative is oil paintings, which used the transparent palette as a medium and pigment to draw pictures on oil cloth made from fabric, paper, and wood. Western painting has different kinds of colors so that they can have a strong and intense force of expression. Generally speaking, oil paintings originate from Europe, and they are filled with various ways to embody art.

2.3. Formed Systems

Owing to the two systems of Chinese painting and Western painting in the face of rapid globalization of economic and political development today, Chinese and Western cultures influence each other is inevitable.

Chinese painting is a generic term for traditional Chinese painting. Chinese painting includes a variety of traditional skills. It also refers to the painting with two major materials, for instance, water as a blender and ink as a primary color. As a result, Chinese painting shows the splendid features of diverse lines and structures so that the abundant force of the description and the unique Chinese characteristics can be seen throughout history.

Western painting is a sort of art painting that has had a huge influence on the world, especially oil paintings, which are the most significant. The oil paintings are a kind of picture that uses the oil as a blender to mix the color materials. People often use it to draw pictures on the board without absorbing the oil. These paintings can also fully embody the different colors and completely deliver the lightness of the space and the atmosphere of tonality, which makes the objects people draw on the board vivid and visual.

Thus, the two major painting systems are as follows: oriental paintings, which are examples of Chinese painting in China, and Western painting, marked by oil paintings in the West. Therefore, both of them have their basic characteristics and historical traditions, which further promote the development of distinguished expressions and aesthetic appreciation.

3. Different Art Performances on Chinese Paintings and Western Paintings

3.1. Artistic Purposes

The special tradition of Chinese painting creates a blend of appearance, spirit, and harmony with nature and humans, which forms a characteristic of ethnic tradition and unique art. Chinese painting, as the main method with line and structure of the brush and ink, melted in the poems by the imagination of the "Spirit", which produced the "silent poems" with the sight, pattern, brush and ink, and the color.

What's more, under the influence of Taoism, people in ancient China believed that the philosophical concepts of the "heart" and "nature" were not only the important foundations for the development of Chinese landscape painting but also had an impact on the surrounding countries. Taoism, which refers to the source of everything, also believes that everything in the world has its own way of being and developing, and it admonishes people to give up any desire to control the world. Thus, Chinese painting pursues the art of harmony between nature and humans [7].

However, Western painting refers to landscape painting, it is also attached to the reality of nature and advocates real reflection of nature. Of course, photographs in the West usually show the scientific spirit, and painters of different ages also have an objective attitude toward the observation of nature. Under the affection of the religious, painters in the West seek the perfect reappearance to the accurate nature so that they regard the way as a contribution to the God of the religion.

Last but not least, the major difference between Chinese painting and Western painting in pursuing art is the sight and imagination of people's subjectivity and opinions. This key point is the most essential trait in the way of expressing the spirit by form, which can achieve a sense of likeness and unlikeness in art. Western painters also think about the question of whether objective matters can be reflected naturally or not. In other words, Western painting cares about objective existence, which can be reappeared objectively, while Chinese painting pay more attention to the expression of the subjective spirit.

3.2. Expressing Methods

The differences between Chinese painting and Western painting exist in terms of art methods. Chinese painting also has its characteristics in these aspects, such as the formation of pictures, using pen and ink, and painting colors [8]. The tools and materials, such as the brush, ink, and colors of Chinese paintings and the Chinese paper, can only be found in China. In other words, these tools used to express the art of painting in Western countries cannot be found, as they are unique to Chinese painting. At the same time, Chinese painting uses "lines" to express art and employs varying amounts of water to embody the style of Chinese paintings. Through the affection for "lines," the characteristics of stones, birds, and people can be depicted in various ways.

Yet, for Western painting, western artists are always good at using oil pigment and clothes to draw paintings. Because the mediums are so different, the ways of expression can be various. When western painters begin to draw pictures in front of them, they also think about the plane. In their mind, they suppose that the facet is easier for them to give the imaginary, which is easier to accept. Through this facet, people can have a sense of volume and reality.

Therefore, the fantastic point of Chinese painting is how to use the brush and ink to express the art. Through the lightness and darkness of the ink, the style can fully be embodied. We, as audiences, should deeply feel the sense of integration of the light ink and

dark ink. The major features of Western painting are the ability to express art through bright colors, space, and plane angles, which can give the audience a kind of reality and objectivity.

3.3. Expressions of the Space

Chinese painting uses real mountains and waters as models, using the method of reality to express the whole scenery of nature. There are three ways to express the features, for instance, the perspective from the top, the perspective from the inner, and the perspective from the plane, which cannot be limited by time and space. Therefore, we can enjoy Chinese painting from different angles and views. The most representative painting, *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains*, painted by Huang Gongwang in the Yuan Dynasty, was a good example of expressing the feeling of space. From a further perspective, we can see an older man sitting on the boat along the river. The conception of space is not an idea of physical space but an expression of the flexible space in nature as well.

Western painting employs focal perspectives to depict a sense of reality. Western painters prefer to make use of the method of reality to express space. With the influence of religion, painters, as honest Christians, accurately express every aspect of the paintings. For instance, when painters in Western countries can draw trees with different high levels from far to near, they will follow natural law. Trees far from the distance would be small and blurry, while trees near the distance would be tall and clear. Western painting creates a sense of three-dimensional space through lightness and darkness and focus on perspectives [9].

Generally speaking, Chinese and Western paintings are different in the expression of the space, which is the purity and method of aesthetics. But I also suppose that paintings both in China and Western countries can mutually study each other and learn together.

4. General Reasons for Differences on Chinese Painting and Western Painting

4.1. Different Thinking Patterns between Chinese and Westerners

4.1.1. The Perceptual Thinking and the Rational Thinking

With the influence of traditional Chinese monism, we, the Chinese, also advocate harmony and unity between nature and humanity. In other words, people are one of the parts of nature. Taoism writes a famous quotation, "Nature does not change, neither does the Way.", which is a good example to prove this truth. Therefore, in Chinese painting, we would like to use the materials of mountains and waters to express the poets' feelings because people can put themselves in nature better than the happiness in their minds. This is a kind of integration between nature and humans from perceptual thinking.

For example, Wang Wei, the father of the Chinese mountains and waters paintings in Tang Dynasty, created a sight with the poetry in the painting and painting in the poetry by sensibility. His famous painting was *Mountain Hut at Autumn Dusk*, which also highly expressed the harmony between man and nature through sensibility. In his poem and painting, the vacant mountain, the fresh rain, the light moon, the clear water, the boat, and a woman who washed clothes near the river these natural scenic spots were drawn on the paper to create a wonderful imagination in mind from different people. Not only to describe these objectives but also to convey the emotions and feelings of painters through these images. Thus, the main idea of unity and harmony between nature and man can be directly expressed with the perceptual sense of imagination.

Under the influence of rational thinking and dualism, humanism is widely embraced by Western painters. Thus, they also think that the relationship between nature and humans should be divided. Rationalism and dualism originated in ancient Greece, and so did the origin of the inspiration art in Greece. We also can remember the Western painting without the appearance of people. In other words, we seldom see people in Western painting. The idea of Westerners and painters was to show an independent and pure nature in front of the audience.

4.1.2. Thoughts of "Image" and "Reality"

The philosophical conception of "Image" and "Reality" is the essential difference between China and the West. Chinese painters seek the idea of "Image" to "Reality". They also regard "Image" as the foundation. We, Chinese painters, can express emotions and feelings from the nothing and blank. At the same time, Western painters are searching for reality. They also question the opinion from "Reality" to "Image". They, western painters, usually take "Reality" as the basis. According to the Western views, they believed that "Image" cannot produce "Reality" at all with any methods.

What's more, Chinese Painting attaches to the combination of the void and reality, which can leave people with more vacant space to imagine what they want to with the subjectivity of persons. From flowers and birds, from mountains and water, they draw on the pictures; these objects also burden the colorful and deep senses in our minds. We also can achieve sound perception from images, which can create a kind of happiness by putting humans into nature.

However, Western painters consider reality to be the most significant part of the drawing. The conception of struggling between "Image" and "Reality" expresses a sort of spirit of fighting, enterprising, and pursuing, which they need to observe or make a comment with an objective attitude.

For instance, the most famous painting, Mona Lisa, painted by Da Vinci, proves the truth about the human body. Influenced by anatomy, Da Vinci had to do serious research on human muscles, bones, and anatomy, which he then accurately depicted in the portrait. Now, when viewing the painting, we can enjoy her vivid smile. Only through serious research and careful observation of reality could Da Vinci paint it so vividly and realistically.

4.2. Different Cultural Backgrounds

4.2.1. Ideas of Religious in China

The religion of three major mainstreams in China, such as Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, created the conception of the Chinese traditional culture, and of course, Chinese painting was involved. The core idea of Confucianism is benevolence, which forms a harmonious system. Also, Confucianism pays much attention to the values of people and the roots of the mind. The standard of beauty appreciation is based on the virtues. Human and nature are all parts of the material world. Painters in China regard drawing as a cultivated way to both mental and physical health.

For Buddhism, it advocates the idea of "Equality" and "Single-minded loyalty" to people in the world. These balanced ties always show the relationship between people and nature. They often stressed that men are born equal. There is an old saying in Buddhism, which is a bunch of reeds leaning on each other. Through this proverb, we can realize that everything or everyone in the world should be united, equal, and in harmony. In other words, all living exists mutually dependently and mutually restrictively, which means that everything cannot live without nature.

For Taoism, it is believed that the universe is produced naturally. Thus, the relationship between nature and humanity is the point of balance. The famous sentence in the poem written by Cheng Ying, who was a great poet in the Song Dynasty, was "All matters in nature were satisfactory." It means being born naturally, located in their ways, and developing themselves in tracks. It is a kind of mutual unity and connection between heaven and humanity, between nature and human beings.

4.2.2. Ideas of Religion in Western Countries

However, under the influence of Christianity in Western countries, especially after the Renaissance, humanism became so popular that the value of people began to be addressed. Therefore, society started to respect humanity, and Western painters adopted more materials for people. Thus, paintings about the religion, including the portraits of

God and Ave Maria, were very popular in the West. For instance, *the Sistine Madonna*, painted by Raphael; the *Last Supper* drawn by Da Vinci, *Genesis* painted by Michelangelo Buonarroti and *The Mourning of Christ* drawn by Giotto di Bondone. Through reading all the pictures they drew, we see that the space of people and God occupied the whole part. In their traditional culture, the relationship between nature and humanity is nearly opposite. In the previous period, the authority of God and religions was above nature, and in the later period, people tamed and mastered nature. Above all, people in Western countries aim to conquer nature, as well as nature, in order to achieve happiness in their lives, as mentioned above.

5. Conclusions

Therefore, the different points mentioned above are all between Chinese painting and Western painting, including the descriptions and expressions of arts and cultures. Because of various backgrounds, different thought patterns, different religions, and different cultures, a variety of paintings from both in China and Western countries are produced around the world.

There are a thousand Hamlets in a thousand people's eyes. We cannot judge which one is good or bad in terms of a certain single culture, but we can enjoy different values from various perspectives because we are living in a world of diversity.

Thus, everyone, every country and culture should be tolerant and open-minded to welcome the diverse progress made by different countries in the world. Let's create a wonderful, amazing and colorful world shoulder by shoulder to reach our target.

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