



Ink and Brush Leading the Era: An Exploration of the Dilemma and Direction of Contemporary Ink Painting Development

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Abstract

In the context of advocating for the imitation of ancient art, Shi Tao proposed the theory of “Ink and Brush Should Follow the Times” to oppose blindly following the trend and not being influenced by the prevailing atmosphere of the times, thus opening up a new era of landscape painting. In the long history of Chinese painting, ink paintings from different eras all have their unique characteristics of the times. By using different techniques of ink and brush, they showcase the characteristics, thoughts, and spirit of the present era and create completely different painting moods. This article studies the practical significance of “Ink and Brush Should Follow the Times” and explores the dilemma and direction of contemporary ink painting development.

Subject Areas

Art, Culture

Keywords

Significance, Contemporary, Challenges, Direction

1. Background of “Ink and Brush Should Follow the Times”

During the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, the painter Shi Tao wrote in his painting postscript: “Ink and brush should follow the times, just as the trend of poetry and literature changes.” His main idea was that blindly following the trend in painting would lead to a decline, just like what happened to ancient poetry and literature. Shi Tao strongly opposed the prevailing trend of landscape painting at that time, which focused on imitating ancient styles and neglected direct observation and perception of nature.

At the same time, other painters of that era mainly followed the methods of ancient artists and adhered to the theory of “Southern and Northern Schools”, emphasizing the imitation of ancient styles and catering to market demands, while neglecting artistic innovation and personal perception. However, Shi Tao, with his critical vision, rebellious spirit, and independent consciousness, created his unique style and was excluded from the orthodox painting circle, playing the role of a local painter and expressing his unique language of ink and brush [1].

In this rapidly developing era, not only should we advocate “Ink and Brush Should Follow the Times”, but we should also promote ink and brush leading the times. Artists should not only pay attention to the times but also be sensitive enough to be at the forefront of the times.

2. Significance of “Ink and Brush Leading the Era”

Ink and brush refer to the general techniques used in Chinese painting, emphasizing the dominance of the brush, the ink following the brush, and the mutual dependence of the two to perfectly depict objects, express artistic conception, and achieve a combination of form and spirit.

Ink painting has its own development laws, and the environment of each era in which painters lived had significant differences, resulting in their works having distinct characteristics of the times and reflecting the era to varying degrees. With the continuous development of history, the traditional pastoral landscape painting style has become less adapted to contemporary urban skyscrapers. Thus, creating ink paintings that fit contemporary aesthetic styles while inheriting tradition has become a major challenge for contemporary artists. In response to the characteristics of development and the pursuit of social progress and innovation, artists should follow the development and changes of the times, root themselves in the core of their national culture, use new forms and language of ink and brush, and create works that express the new style of the times [2].

3. The Development Challenges of Chinese Painting in the Era

3.1. Changes in Living Environment

The modern society has undergone tremendous changes compared to the ancient society. It is rare to see pastoral scenery in daily life, as high-rise buildings dominate the skyline in urbanized areas. The visual and spiritual experiences of painters in modern urban life are vastly different from those of traditional painters, and their expression and content in art creation have also changed [1]. Focusing on this, Fan Feng, a contemporary painter, has created a series of “Untitled” artworks (Figure 1) that depict the new urban landscape, breaking away from the limitations of traditional landscape paintings and avoiding the trap of blindly following ancient masters.

3.2. Changes in Emotions

With the development of urbanization and the acceleration of people’s pace of



Figure 1. “Untitled” (Fan Feng). (Image source: <https://www.baidu.com/>)

life, everything can be solved through smartphones, leading to less and less communication between people and changes in the way emotions are expressed. The emergence of new products such as TV dramas and games has made it difficult for traditional and quiet art forms such as Chinese painting to arouse contemporary interests. However, Chen Ping’s work “Dreaming of Home Mountain” relies on strong colors to stimulate people’s interest (**Figure 2**).

3.3. Changes in Market Demands

With the continuous development of the economy, people’s love for calligraphy and painting has gradually increased. However, due to uneven levels of consumer spending, there are now many cheap and poorly made decorative works in the market, which blindly pursue and cater to popular tastes. The changes in the market have led artists to excessively pursue the benefits of their works, while losing the emotional expression and creative drive in their creations.

4. The Development Direction of Contemporary Chinese Painting

4.1. Inheritance

The development of contemporary ink painting first requires a strong “root”, which is the traditional cultural history of China’s five thousand years. We cannot



Figure 2. “Dreaming of home mountain” (Chen Ping). (Image source: <https://www.baidu.com/>)

forget it. We need to combine modern cultural elements and aesthetic requirements with traditional painting to form a painting style suitable for contemporary aesthetic tastes. We should inherit and develop on the basis of tradition and open up new paths.

4.2. Inclusiveness

We are currently in an era of multiculturalism, openness, tolerance, and collision. Despite the impact of various Western cultures, Chinese painting still demonstrates its strong vitality. As contemporary painters, we need to balance the relationships between different cultures, integrate and accept new cultural elements, and stimulate new vitality for Chinese painting.

4.3. Nationality

Looking at the world, the Eastern and Western cultures have distinct national characteristics. Chinese ink painting should inherit and promote the excellent qualities of national characteristics, integrating the aesthetic feelings of contemporary people and national culture into the creation of ink painting, demonstrating the prosperous spirit of the times in China. This is the key to Chinese

painting standing in the forest of nations. Before the 10th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, the painters Fu Baoshi and Guan Shanyue collaborated to create a masterpiece, "The Scenery of This Land is So Beautiful". (Figure 3) The two main arteries connect the entire picture into a whole, symbolizing the unity and prosperity of the great motherland. It inspired many Chinese painters' creative ideas and opened up new themes and patterns for Chinese painters who were in a specific social and historical environment at that time.



Figure 3. "The scenery of this land is so beautiful". (Image source: <https://www.baidu.com/>)

5. Conclusion

"Ink and Brush Leading the Era" requires us to inherit cultural traditions, grasp the spirit of the times, firmly believe in our own culture, and lead the development of the times. It also requires us to bring the aesthetic perceptions of the people to a higher level, and open a new chapter in the leadership of pen and ink in the times. New cultures are nurtured in new environments, and every generation of artists has their own unique mission. However, the spirit of daring to explore remains unchanged [3].

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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