



On the Cultural Difference and Performance in the Modernization Process of Chinese and Japanese Painting for the Twentieth Century

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Abstract

China and Japan have a long history in the communication of the two countries' culture and arts. Chinese drawing and Japanese drawing, belonging to the eastern Asian art circle, share common aesthetic tendency and cultural identity and affect, enrich each other during the process of mutual exchange and absorption, and stand in the worldwide national arts in parallel. The modern Japanese drawing, based on the absorption of Chinese traditional drawing and western drawings, forms its own distinct national characteristics, diffuses along with the culture and arts communication and brings enlightenment and influences on the modern development, transition and research.

Key words: Chinese drawing; Modern Japanese drawing; Transformation of modernization

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INTRODUCTION

There exists an inseparable historical origin between Japanese culture and Chinese traditional culture. Chinese scholars put forward a concept of "Chinese cultural circle" regarding the research on Chinese and Japanese relations, with the opinion that eastern Asian countries including Japan, Korea and Vietnam are members of "Chinese culture circle". Before the western European

culture is imported into these countries in 19th century, these countries take China as model for political structure, production model and manners and customs etc. Chinese characters are universal in these countries and Chinese characters are very popular until the early Meiji (Wang, 1989).

Culture and art of China and Japan are mutually affected due to their special location. As a form of national art from two different countries, Chinese drawing and Japanese drawing have a deep historical origin and reflect the intimacy of the two traditional cultures. Scholar Lauroence Binyon (1869-1943) in the direction of eastern culture, said in his book of *the spirit of man*: "In Japanese art history, it absorbs the initial inspiration from China, gradually develops its own character and accepts the new theme" (Sun, trans., 1988, pp.95-96). Chinese arts play an impressive and wide influence on the aesthetic view and art style of Japanese arts. Japanese drawing absorbs a lot of nutrition from Chinese traditional arts and finally forms their own special style. In the opinion of Japanese scholars, there will be no Japanese culture without Chinese culture and even they compare Chinese culture as "arts of father" of Japan.

According to Japanese historical records, since the Sui and Tang dynasty, the cultural communication between Japan and China started and Chinese drawing affected the Japanese drawing inconsistently to make the Japanese drawing correspondingly have the popular style of Chinese drawings. During 13-16 centuries, ink painting arts of Song Yuan dynasty are popular in the age of Japan's muromachi and lots of famous masters in ink art painting appeared. During 17-19 centuries, Chinese literati painting influenced the south movement of Edo period and most of Chinese painters went to Japan to diffuse the painting skills. The Japanese painters are proud of knowing Chinese culture. Since the 19th century, most of drawings of Japanese artists are reflected with Chinese literati paintings' influence. The Japanese paintings are

impressively influenced by Chinese traditional paintings because of the historical origin of Chinese and Japanese culture, which embodies the aesthetic conception and unique national spirit of eastern arts.

Japanese painting and Chinese painting keep the relation in the early 19th century. After Meiji restoration, Japanese painting has developed to be an independent system and comes to be a new model and important part of eastern drawing. Reversion occurred in the eastern movement of mainland culture. Modern Japanese drawing with national character is formed by absorbing Chinese traditional arts and Western arts and it also brings inspirations and influences to the transformation of Chinese modernized paintings.

1. CULTURAL ORIGIN OF CHINESE DRAWING AND JAPANESE DRAWING WITH MODERN TRANSFORMATION

Japanese drawing surpassed the classical form, coming to be a representative modern drawing, as a result of coaction of different cultural pattern and social background. Not only does it embody the modernized transformation of material and techniques but also importantly embodies that its content and concept have a continuous line with Japanese national culture. What the modern Japanese drawing mainly spreads and gives up is the part that brings from ancient Chinese arts. The difference between Japanese drawing and Chinese drawing embodies as followed by the two points: firstly, the Japanese drawing keeps its own national spirit and aesthetic feeling during evolution. Secondly, it recognizes and accepts the modern arts.

Japanese arts value the inner elegance more than the exterior glory. "Beauty, emotions and harmonious society" is a special aesthetic pursuit for Japanese nationalism. This nation has a tradition to find beauty from "feeble and stable objects" and "instantaneous life form", which is like the fine and smooth aesthetical feeling of a woman. It can be summarized with a "shrinking" cultural mentality. Japanese modernized drawing succeeds the delicacy and exquisiteness of the arts. The works do not only embody the perceptual experience of the will of life, but also embodies the rational reflection on life value and aesthetic concept of *mono no aware* and elegance and quietness. All these concepts keep running through their daily life and arts, no matter what kind of art types it has, the aesthetic emotion in this work is specially owned by Eastern nations.

Japan, with strong national awareness, is equipped with high enthusiasm to absorb foreign culture. As long as they think it excellent, they will implement thorough study and are good at absorbing specialty of foreign culture to extend the concept of "combination", so a historical character of adaptation and diversity of Japanese culture is formed. During the process of modernizing transformation for Japanese drawing, what it gets rids of is the traditional

features rather than its own aesthetic features. It is the thorough absorption of Western arts that fully spread the feature of modernization.

Chinese drawing values the manifestation of expressing emotions and poetry, but the great difference is existed between aesthetic pursuit and that of Japanese drawing. Compared with the "concept of thorough implement", "strong common sense of Chinese nature" helps them avoid extreme in the world of concept and action (Sun, 1988, p.97). The conservativeness and "traditional complex" of Chinese drawing also have its own impressive social background and great inertial force affected by traditions.

The natural environment where Chinese artists live is different from that of Japan. They value the profound aesthetic connotation more, in favor of "grandness" and "immutability". Based on the inconsistent aesthetic pursuit and cultural psychology, Chinese drawers always have prejudice on "perfectness" and "refinedness", with the opinion that exquisite and fine emotional experience is a lack of masculine beauty and excessive sculpture skills lose the proper style and height of arts.

This difference is also obviously showed on the attitude of accepting the modern arts. Japanese drawers learn from western arts and take the complete drawing concepts and methods of western countries as their own use. Chinese drawers take a studying attitude of limited absorption and selective abandonment. They almost can't thoroughly break with traditions and can't thoroughly absorb the foreign culture, as a result, China, until now, haven't finished its transformation of modernization, which can fully explain social culture mode's great impact on the arts.

The tendency and preference of aesthetics should be showed naturally during the process of arts creation and specific historical age. Japanese drawings feature with partial exquisiteness and integral grandness. If the modern art style is consistent with Western modern spirit, a kind of harmony which looks like paradox is expressed in Japanese arts under this condition. Benedict ever described the dual characters of contradiction in a work of *chrysanthemum and sword* which discuss the Japanese cultural spirit. He summarizes the basic model and structure of Japanese culture and to some extents the cultural background which is relied by the different aesthetic character of Japanese arts and Chinese arts can be reflected.

2. THE DIFFERENT POSITION AND DIRECTION OF JAPANESE AND CHINESE DRAWING MODERNIZATION IN THE 20TH CENTURY.

In history, Chinese drawing and Japanese drawing are similar with each other in the tradition and they both take

the western culture as a start of the new art development, however, their renovation road is so different. The modern Japanese drawing concept is inclusive, not only featuring with eastern aesthetic spirit but also blending the style of Western drawing ingeniously, which is different from Chinese drawing with emphasis on conservativeness on traditional thoughts in value orientation and position.

The concept of “Japanese drawing” was formed approximately at the end of 19th century. Since the Meiji restoration, Japanese arts have experienced two times of spring tides of westernization. The modern Japanese drawing gives up the concept of narrow nationalism, strives with the guideline of “creating the worldwide drawings” and paves the way for modernizing transformation in thoughts and systems. This kind of thought, along with the mature of representative drawers, comes to be more reasonable.

.....Especially it is obvious for the late rising drawers to absorb the modeling language and feeling characteristics of Western modernized drawings. The color tends to be sprightly and intense, at the same time, the pigment and drawing method is close to oil painting. Besides, the drawers trying the abstract drawing also appeared..... (Zu, 1986).

Japanese drawing, based on the breakthrough of colors, fully absorbs technique of expressions including drawing type, color concept, areal perspective, application of color and so on and expresses the beauty of harmony, beauty of type, beauty of material, beauty of color, exquisite feeling and static aesthetic consciousness. A lot of technique tasks including material modification and technique innovation are correspondingly solved one after another and the basic mode of modern Japanese drawing is established.

It is a new try and expansion for Japanese drawing to absorb the concepts and techniques of Western painting and to reconcile the western and eastern concepts of drawing concepts with the breakthrough of modernized aesthetic consciousness. The modern Japanese drawing has created a set of techniques which can compare with the oil paintings on the visual effect, the color comes to be its basic vocabulary and realizes the transformation from tradition to modernization.

Chinese drawing lays emphasis on documentary subjects at an early stage and mainly features with thick colors. Ink painting starts to be populous in the Tang dynasty of AD 8th century and evolves to be the main style of Chinese drawing after 10th century. The theory of ancient Chinese drawings thinks “five colors of ink” and it means after the classification of thick and thin, the ink drawings will also be as rich and admirable as colorful colors. Traditional Chinese philosophy advocates tranquility and plain and thinks that human should get along well with nature harmoniously. The ink painting should abstract the colorful world and carry out the new model featuring with black and white color, combining

with the philosophical experience of chasing plain, which comes to be the most favorable art styles for the intellectuals. After the 13th century, a lot of free sketch drawers and excellent works appeared in Chinese drawing circles and the drawers who are good at colors and realism are gradually marginalized.

At the early of 20th century, the concept of modeling is introduced into Chinese drawings and there still exist deviation from the knowledge of the relation between colors and inks. It mainly expresses with the ink, even simple color expression is gave up because of limitation of material. The tool and material character is used to generate enjoyable style. Chinese drawing attributes the loss of color to the limitation of material and it is difficult to get rid of traditional frames. Corresponding position is not obtained during the process of modernizing transformation. Even though, the color is the most prominent advantages of Western drawing and therefore it is difficult to be included into the ink system of Chinese drawing.

Compared with Chinese drawers, Japanese drawers have a more thorough study on the western arts. Not only do they study the modeling factors of Western drawing, but also they integrate the drawing concept and method into the drawing system of this nation. The advantages in the expressing of western drawing color come to be the breakthrough of Japanese drawing reform and on the expressing the ink is gave up and the color is chose. Therefore, the “thoroughness” of Japanese modernized transformation and “experience” of Chinese drawing origins from different aesthetical choice.

Ink and color, at two different orientations of the transformation of Chinese drawing and Japanese drawing, also decides the basic tendency of two drawings. But it doesn't mean Chinese drawing gives up the pursuit for colors and the success of modern Japanese drawing transformation comes to be the “mirror image” of Chinese drawing development. Compared with Japanese drawing, Chinese drawing can't realize the modern transformation as a result of no thoroughness of absorbing the foreign culture and can't finish the exploring in combining colors and inks.

3. REFLECTIONS AND ENLIGHTENMENT OF THE RENOVATION OF CHINESE AND JAPANESE DRAWING

It has a history of more than one hundred years for the rise and evolution of Japanese modernized movement. In the 20th century, Japanese drawing finished the transformation from traditions to the modern and basically establishes a style which is different from the traditional form and also owned the eastern spirit. From the angle of high speed development, the Japan shows a relatively stable formal structure which matches the modern aesthetic

awareness. Its general feature is the unification of creative thoughts, pure language style and innovation of material and techniques, which undoubtedly have an enlightening important role in the Chinese drawing which has not thoroughly got rid of the traditional mode in the 21st century.

Although the modern development of Chinese drawing is similar to that of Japan, the reformation way and result are different. Chinese drawings do not have clear boundary and value regarding the modernization of arts and are lack of sense of direction, comparing with Japanese drawing. It is an inevitable choice to change the wane of Chinese drawings by the concept of modern arts. Chinese society has a repeatability of cultural identity and inconsistency of creative thoughts, which influence the thoroughness of modernization of traditional arts. Although a new Chinese drawing which unifies the thoughts and techniques appeared in the process of exploring the modern Chinese drawings, a relative common sense is hard to be established in the Chinese drawing circle and greater influence is difficult to be generated.

The art of 21st century takes its uniqueness as the precondition of modernization. Chinese economy has gradually realized its modernization and reformation and opening up can provide impetus to develop culture and arts. The modern process of Chinese drawing starts from the technique of rebelling ink drawings and being far away from nature, but under the social environment of “renaissance” of traditional culture in these years, it returns to its original interest. Profound “enjoyable experience” and relying on ink drawing is creative inertia for Chinese drawers. This inertia is up to the degeneration of the appreciators’ awareness and we have to say this problem deserves our warning. Chinese drawing needs to renew the concept and the innovative spirit of Japanese modernized drawings is worthwhile of reference. It must be admitted that Chinese drawings never stop reforming and developing in the long history. Assimilating capacity is better than imitative capacity regarding foreign culture and absorbing the foreign arts should not lose national feature as the cost, which makes it difficult and slow to transform the traditional culture to modernizations.

CONCLUSION

Under the international condition that the modernized thoughts sweep over the globe, as the important eastern countries, the difference of Chinese and Japanese arts does not only reflect the two different countries’ national culture features but also reflect the social practice of art development. Through comparing the historical evolution of traditional arts of the two countries in 20th century, we can understand the form and concept of the modernized drawings of the two countries, what’s more, it has enlightened on the innovative road of traditional eastern arts in the 21st century: The initiate or the inheritance of the art innovation are mutually premise, especially under the reflection of different art conception, reformation of national drawing can be carried on through comparing itself with other arts.

From the macro angle, it seems to be difficult to describe the future condition of Chinese drawing, because it is not a simple problem that whether the isolated drawing can obtain new life. Chinese drawing art can’t be valued in the world again until it carries out the transformation of modernization successfully. Ink – oriented traditional Chinese drawing and color – oriented Japanese drawing absorbs the nutrition of modern drawing in the position of parallel and communicates and mix with each other to develop a new drawing mode that perfectly combines the traditional spirit and modern frames. Chinese drawing brings the new ink drawings into modern drawing with the color as mainstream and step into worldwide drawing circle with unique eastern cultural character. A new frame of modern eastern drawings is established, which separates and intersects with Japanese drawing and which is also independent and mutual affected.

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