

The Creations and Research in the Regional Landscape Spirit of Heilongjiang Province

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Abstract

Heilongjiang Province is located in the northeastern border part of People's Republic of China. Compared with those coastal provinces, the inner land provinces are less developed economically or culturally. However, the discovery of Hongshan civilization, the brilliant civilization of Bohai Kingdom which was affiliated to the Tang Dynasty (618AD~907AD), the nomadic and agro-culture of the ethnic groups of Jurchens minority (the ancestry of Manchu minority), Manchu minority and Mongolian minority, and the Russian culture deposit, all of these above shows that Heilongjiang is not barren in cultural deposit at all. Instead, it still, to some extent, holds its "used-to-be" splendor. The seasonal changes there are distinct, which nurtured a piece of richly-endowed land that in return nourishes its unique natural characteristics and excellent people. All of these present a subject for the research in Chinese landscape painting.

Key words: Heilongjiang; Landscape spirit; Regional

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Heilongjiang is the remotest northeastern province of China. Human activities have been proved to exist 30,000 to 40,000 years ago from now. The earliest state established here is called Yufu State in the later years of the Warring States Period (475BC~221BC). The Tang Dynasty(618AD~907AD) set up three regional

administrations here successively, namely, Shiwei Administration, Heishui Administration and Bohai Administration. After Qidan tribe had conquered Bohai Kingdom, the Dongdan State was established here. The Jin State set its capital city at Huiningfu (now named as Baicheng of Acheng City of Heilongjiang province). After Yanjing City (now as Beijing, also Peking) was set as the capital by Yuan Dynasty (1271AD~1368AD), this region was set as part of Liaoyang Province. Ming Dynasty (1368AD~1644AD) founded Nuergan Regional Administration here which governed 384 Weis (a military rank which consisted of 5,600 soldiers or so) and 24 Suos (also a military unit which is ranked lower than Wei). The Qing Dynasty (1644AD~1912AD, the last feudalist empery in Chinese history) also founded a regional administration here which was named as Niguta, and was later renamed as Jilin General. Many ethnic minorities used to and still inhabit here, including Manchu, Korean, Hui, Mongolian, Dawoer, Xibo, Elunchun, Hezhe, Ewenke and Keerkezi. As earlier as in the North-South Splitting Period (420AD~589AD, a splitting period of time in ancient Chinese history), the Xianbei minority had migrated from Da Hinggan Ling Mountain Ranges and founded Beiwei State in central area of ancient China, which left us with a variety of precious cultural and artistic heritages, such as Yungang Grottos and Longmen Grottos. Actually, after the Jin State uprooted the Beisong Dynasty, the communication gap was broken and the economic and cultural exchanges between Heilongjiang and central area were promoted afterwards.

Heilongjiang is time-honored. According to the Wuji Minority in Wei Historical Record, the Wuji State is located to the north of ancient Korean Kingdom. It used to be called as Sushen State. The inhabitants among their tribes are varied in talents. They all, especially those tribes in eastern area, have well-built body. Their language is uniquely different from that of other parts. The earth underneath there is wet. They live in peak-shaped caves

the “door” of which is sky-confronted and installed with stairs as a passage. They do not have cattle there, but they do have horses and chariots. The cultivated land is farmed once in a while, and the chariots are pushed forward by human labor. As to farming, they grow millet, broom corn millet and sunflowers. The vapor is salty and dense, and salt crystalloid could form on the trees. There are salt ponds as well. The tribe members mainly raise pigs, instead of sheep. They eat rice and brew grain-fermented spirit and usually get drunk once they get drunk. Women dress themselves with cloth-made dress, and men are coated with fur. They are adapted at hunting with stones as arrowheads and with a bow at the length of 1 meter and an arrow of 1 chi and 2 cun.

Artists have been researching and pondering many years in whether artistic inditement is regionally characteristic or not. As the emerging of western artistic modernism, especially as the wide spreading of “globalization” notion, some people began to launch the propaganda holding the viewpoint that globalization should be the mainstream and goal that all artistic inditements are supposed to be set for and regional characteristics bear no importance at all and thus, the schools of regional painting are unnecessary to exist. Some even think that the advocacy of regional artistic features and schools represents a kind of narrow and conservative regionality, which I can’t say I agree with, however. To some degree, the artistic regionality is an issue of national identity. As for art, it bore with the character of regionality as it came into being. The movements advocating fresh artistic thoughts have been launched in both eastern and western history, but never has a kind of “universal artistic thought with uniformity” been launched or achieved. Nowadays with the rapid promotion of globalization, science and technology, and information exchanges, the intercultural communication in art and its influence have also become noticeable. Under this kind of circumstance, developed countries carry out their values export on society and culture, which causes an illusion that their culture seems to represent the universal trend. This is so untrue and unacceptable to the rest of the nations in the world. The artistic forms are always diverse as they are. It was these regionally characteristic inditements by different nations that make our world a place of colorful artistic blossom. The culture that hegemonic countries carry out is at most a sort of cultural fashion, and it will never ever become a universally accepted model. Under this circumstance, the cultural regionality is of great significance. Of course, this is not an intention for self cultural conservatism and isolation. On the contrary, it appeals us to start from our realistic life and make inditement featured with regionality, based on the familiarization with both ourselves and others and the drawing on others’ strongpoints.

As the old saying goes, we could always benefit from the study in history. Succession and development are

the theme in Chinese painting. The analysis in artists from all parts of country, the intellectual storage for further familiarizing with and presenting Heilongjiang Province, the research and study in the Heilongjiang’s development of landscape culture should all be based on the familiarization with ancient and current times.

1. THE DIFFERENCE IN PHYSIOGNOMY AND THE FORMATION OF PAINTING STYLE.

During the Five Dynasties Period (907~960), artists in different areas had different comprehension and portray towards culture, which is closely related to regional natural environment. The mountains in the north are mostly uniquely precipitous, magnificent and towering, but those in the north, however, are mainly featured with tender beauty and smoothness. We could say that different environments shape and nurture different painting styles. Thus, northern painting school and southern painting school came into being respectively.

The several well-known northern landscape artists have their own feature. Guan Tong’s work is precipitous, Li Cheng’s is far-flung, and Fan Kuan’s is splendid. These three different styles were called “three schools’ landscape portray styles”. They are distinct from one another and contain their own style. In fact, all of the three painting schools drew their inspiration from Jing Hao who put equal emphasis on landscape and brush-ink skills, which focuses on the presentation of magnificence, precipitousness and coulee. All the northern artists share a feature in common of portraying the stony and firm texture of mountains by adopting “nail skill”, “raindrop skill” and “stripe skill”. Thus, they collectively formed the northern painting school between Five Dynasties Period and early Beisong Dynasty mainly portraying the mountains and rivers of Henan Province, Shaanxi Province and Gansu Province. In a summary, the northern style is fundamentally different from that of southern one featured with smooth and humid landscape created by soft painting lines.

The excellent representatives of southern painting school are Dong Yuan and Jing Hao. Like them, Ju Ran also live in the south whose work is thus not that precipitous or towering, but graceful and softly beautiful. Dong Yuan successfully developed his own style known as “Pimacun” (a kind of brush painting technique used to present the outline and grain of the rock formation) and “color-gradation technique” which tries to show the volume of stone or rock by outlining and then color-gradating them. Unlike Jing Hao or Guan Tong’s work presented horizontally and stretching to the left and right sides respectively, Dong Yuan’s work of landscape is mostly smooth and short of sharp edges and bumps. His paintings does not outline the ripple of the waters, but

leave an area of blankness on the China paper as water and the mist around the mountain tops. Waters and mist add radiance and charm to each other, unfolding a misted and blurred picture of wonderland. Actually, Ju Ran was instructed by Dong Yuan in painting. However, Ju Ran did not copy his enlightener mechanically and developed his own style, instead. He integrated the “toweringness and far-flungness” of the north with the “horizontalness and far-reachingness” of the south and make his painting more fresh and natural. The later Nanzong painting which prevailed in Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties was descended and drew its inspiration from it exactly.

Through analyzing the ancient Chinese brush painting schools thoroughly, we could find out that the northeastern style, especially that of Heilongjiang, was not included into any school: the excellent landscape work of Shaanxi and Gansu (these two provinces are located in the northwest of China) drew by the Jing Hao has nothing to do with the northeast; besides, the hillocks and plains in the northeast seem to bear too much resemblance with those of the south, but again unfortunately, they were excluded by the latter. Having analysis in the evolvement of the northern and southern paintings and researching in the landscape of Heilongjiang, we could draw a conclusion that Heilongjiang’s physiognomy is mainly about plains and hillocks which is similar to that of the south such as Wuyi Mountains and thus different from the traditional northern physiognomy featured with precipice and deep valley, such as Taihang Mountains. Heilongjiang is abundant in water systems, wetlands, hillocks, pines and cypresses, and all these natural formations are similar to the landscape drew by Huang Gong-wang and Shen Zhou. This kind of far-stretching sight is just like an unfolding hand scroll which presents us with a view of fields weaved by crisscross footpath: all the corn field, paddies, soybeans, sunflowers nestling on the hillsides and plains. Especially in autumn when the crops are all ripe and golden-like in color, the ample monsoon rainfall causes water systems full and connect with one another, dynamism and quietness weave together making a lively image, we can imagine that all of these themselves as an borderless unfolding scroll.

2. THE GUARDING OF HEILONGJIANG’S SPIRITUAL HOMELAND

Hegel defined art as sentimental presentation of rational notion. The rational notion are not easy to be formed, deep and remote hillocks, borderless Three River Alluvial Plain, the geometrical structure, the complanation of vertical and deep space, the remote horizon, the lofty air, the monsoon, the mist, the clouds pushed by wind, all of these need the painters to watch and think through with rational aesthetic notion. Painters ought to seek the spiritual portray of rusticity, magnificence, grandeur of

the natural landscape through their careful observation at daily life and the nature and on the basis of emotional cultivation.

“The mist of authentic hills and waters varies from season to season: in spring it is congenial and joyful; in summer luxuriant and green; in fall thin and scarce; in winter pale and vapid. The misty mountains also seasonally distinct: in spring it is light and joyous like a smiling face; in summer luxuriantly green and crystal like raindrops; in fall clear and bright like women’s face with make-up; in winter gloomy weary like sleep.”

“In spring, mists and clouds are pervasive, and people are all cheered up; in summer, trees are exuberant and shady, and people are unperturbed; in fall, leaves fall down, and people feel pity for that; in winter, the hills are bold, pale and shaded by dull atmosphere, and people feel chilly and lonely.”

Guo Xi compares directly human spirit to seasonal landscape, this indicates that the ancient Chinese painters drew the essential spirit of landscape with perceptive emotion rather than realistic painting. In the inditement, painters stick to the principle that mountains you draw are not the external mountains you see, which also applies to waters. Here, the concrete image of mountains is abstracted as symbol or note to convey human’s feelings and emotions. The abstracted and symbolized formula serves as media just like the conventional aesthetic concept that the elephant have no concrete shape, and the thunder have no volume. The artist Shi Tao in Qing Dynasty pointed out that “Jian” (evil thoughts or ideas) exists in human beings’ mind and “Cang” (a truly pure heart) could be nurtured by men’s perceptive power. However, ordinary people can’t get that. “Jian” refers to a Buddhist notion, and mind refers to humans’ spirit. Humans’ mind is affected by various false worldly ideas or thoughts, which causes the appearance of five sorts of “Jian”, namely conflict, satkaya-drsti (care about oneself excessively), prejudice and other false thought except for the several mentioned above. When your mind is occupied by these false thoughts, your original ideas are already lost, and what’s worse, you can’t paint well haunted by these evil mindset. The concept “Cang” is from Buddhism as well. Buddhism holds the idea that all the thoughts are buried in one heart. Shi Tao threw out a question: if your heart is filled with evil ideas, how could you find a pure heart? Shi Tao also thought that painters need to perceptive power to develop their own unique technique, which is not understood by ordinary people. That’s why he said “ordinary people can’t get that”.

Looking at the marvelous autumn clouds, people’s feelings run riot in a pleasant way; confronting the spring breeze, one’s mind goes far and wide. All of these poem shows that the landscape painting is not portrayed mechanically and dully, but integrated with painters’ feelings and emotions, which is why it is that vital and lively.

In the preface of landscape, Hu Zong-bing said that Kunlun Mountains are so huge, and compared to them men's eyes' are so tiny that they can't hold a whole view of the mountains in a single glance from a near position. Only as you see the mountains from a far position, can you secure a panoramic view over it. When it comes to the painting, he said that the limited size of China paper could hold the huge Kunlun Mountains which is thousands of ren (an ancient length measurement unit) at height and stretches hundreds of li (500 meters) horizontally as long as the painters draw them from a far sight. This provides an acceptable technique in realistic painting of natural beauty.

The artistic creation exists in spirit. Concrete objects could be seized and presented easily, while the invisible spirit could be understood only by perceptive power.

The excellent historic artists' viewpoints could be regarded as the guidance for our re-acquaintance with landscape. It could help us know the Heilongjiang's nature better from a spiritual perspective till to a higher level of landscape culture.

Heilongjiang's seasonal changes are distinct and has dense water systems and great and mysterious border rivers, such as Heilongjiang River and Wusuli River which stretches 2300 km and is primitive and time-honored and mysterious. Now six tourist itinerary have been developed, such as headstream exploration of Heilongjiang River, the Three Gorges at border river at Luobei, the confluent river mouth of three rivers (namely Heilongjiang River, Songhua River and Wusuli River) at Tongjiang County. Among all of them, the most well-known one is the middle part of the border river from Jiayin of Yichun City to Luobei of Hegang City along the banks of which there are precipitous mountains and beautiful landscape which are entitled as the Three Gorges of Heilongjiang. Cruise along the border rivers not just bring you with natural beauty alongside the banks and primitive eco-environment, but also give you a glance of exotic customs. You could enjoy yourself in the sightseeing of the branches of Songhua River, Mudan River, Woken River, Xingkai Lake, Jingpo Lake, Five Lotus Ponds and numerous water systems. The marsh lands covers a area of 8.67 million hectares in total, among which natural marshes bear a proportion of 5.56 million hectares which is the 1/7 of the total marshes of China, making Heilongjiang one of the most marsh densely-distributed province nationwide. These marshes are the habitats for red-crowned cranes and oriental white cranes to inhabit and stay when migrating. Up to now, 78 marsh preservation areas of a total coverage of 4.23 million hectares have been built up, 19 of which are nationally-ranked and the rest are provincially-ranked. There are 7 internationally-ranked marshes, namely Zhalong, Three Rivers, Honghe River, Xingkai Lake, Treasure Island, Qixing River, Nanweng River. 15 national wetland parks including Baiyupao Park were developed. All of these altogether with Daxing'an Mountains, Xiaoxing'an

Mountains and their affiliated ranges form a magnificent artistic scroll. There are forest seas of Yichun, the picturesque Da xing'an Mountains, the fields weaved with crisscross footpaths, the crops on the hillsides, the black soil, the ripe golden-like crops, the towering larches and Korean pines, the borderless wetlands, and the tovertop-shaped grain bins. The Tangwang River in monsoon presents a view full of mists. In Tangwang River National Park, there are exuberantly green hills, the fantastic view of rock formation seas, the towering Korean pines and aged trees, the tremendous forest seas, the lightly fragrant smell of pine oil which makes you pleased and joyful. And of course, one thing you mustn't miss is the towering, picturesque, poetic and romantic silver birches. The Maolan Waterfall is richly endowed by the nature and uniquely charming and irresistible. All the nature wonders constitute a set of basic notes of the mountains and river painting.

Recent years, the artistic undertaking in Heilongjiang has been making stable progress. We place equal emphasis on the adoption of traditional technique and drawing inspiration from realistic life and thus have created many excellent works. Heilongjiang' artistic undertaking always has a clear goal which is on the basis of succession, innovation and development and aimed to represent the orientation of China's advanced culture and mainstream practical culture, responding to the cultural and artistic policy of the CPC and the state. That is why Heilongjiang' cultural cause presents a positive tendency of inheriting the fine traditional essence and guarding against the decaying and backward culture. Cultural innovation makes cultural cause more representative and valuable on the precondition of not leading to extremism, which make various artistic forms prosperous after the Great Northern Wilderness printing painting influences the artistic field greatly nationwide, such as traditional Chinese painting, oil painting, engraving and rubbing painting, sculpture, ice carving, watercolor painting, lacquer painting, comics, artistic design and research in artistic theory, etc.

The integration of Heilongjiang's customs and habits with its natural landscape represents a higher ideology, namely art. The natural beauty and humans' feelings towards that both belong to men's aesthetic practice in real life including the research in aesthetic subject and objects. The research in aesthetic subject focused on the aesthetic process from a emotional level to a rational level. The study in the concentration, summary, abstraction and transformation of aesthetic activity and the concrete expression of this sort of activity can be defined as "art". Several sketches of Heilongjiang's realistic life and field researches in the frigid area, mountains and rivers, customs and habits, regional cultural traditions and psychological ideology are mainly about study and presentation of northern landscape spirit. Take one thing for instance, the analysis in the previous accomplishments including classification and re-summary of their works leads to a fresh new expression technique by the means

of the pictures and characters. When it comes the concrete painting methods, contents, technique, spiritual expression, etc., we should innovate and develop them based on the lesson taught from older generation and also through self study and training.

External aesthetics: to watch the natural movements: what you see, you see; what you do not see, you do not see.

Internal aesthetics: to seek for the stillness which can be achieved with the four general painting techniques: showing the shades and texture of rocks and mountains by light ink strokes in traditional Chinese landscape painting, rubbing, creating ink spots and painting with thick ink to create an more overwhelming feeling.

The traditional Chinese painting must blaze a new trail in its development. The adoption of the northern regionality might as well be a practical and acceptable way. Based on the notion, we should think about and seek for a mainstream idea that advocates a return to the local cultural regionality from a brand new angle. This sort of idea should aim to bring the regional artistic creation to a theatrical level, to study further and thoroughly, to create more creatively, to achieve a full display of the advantages in regional potential and to make a full use of the expressive force of Chinese painting in order to realize the ultimate goal of diversifying ideas and promoting Chinese painting. This goal caters exactly to the orientation that we should spare our efforts towards based on the idea that the Chinese painting ought to keep its paces with the times. The landscape spirit is a perfect combination of the abstraction of the nature and the landscape complex in the painters' inner heart. Pay attention to the lingual feature of landscape painting and seeking for the expressive forces of other regionality are the dominant direction in the development of Chinese painting. Rich traditional painting deposit and the adoption of foreign culture provides a broader space for both color presentation and the innovation in painting tools, making it more infectious in expressive forces and visual impact. While what of more significance should be the integration of the presentation of human culture spirit and the formation of painting style of artists and the regionality. As local artists, we should base our artistic creation on our homeland culture, major deeply in it, and put the magnificent physiognomy and northeastern civilization into our artistic creation.

The Heilongjiang artists' exploration in the local folk culture, natural landscape and regionally featured artistic languages are always based on their homeland which nourished them. Seeking for the aesthetic uniqueness is always the goal for them from the very beginning to no end. Only a few artists have made it to achieve it the one representative of whom is Luo Yun-shun. His work expresses his values on universe (which is named as "Bahuang" spirit). His work is extracted from precipitous mountains, luxuriant plains, simple cabin, hillocks, valleys and bumps in the north and successfully expresses

their splendor, simpleness. As an artist of younger generation, bearing the mission of modern artists in heart, he combined the visible landscape with his values on world and universe and created characteristic lingual symbols in his painting, making his work more extensive and profound than the traditional spirit of "horizontal and far-flung", "lofty and far-flung", "deep and far-flung". To be more precise, he treats time as philosophic notion and put it into his work, creating a new spirit of his own of "quiet and far-flung", "peaceful and far-flung" and "ancient and far-flung". In his work, earth is a piece of nurturing land to all the lives; rives are blood vessels of the earth; the mountain's shape is embodied by elephant and integrated into the universe. That 's the core spirit of his painting. The Poetic Imagery of Tang poetry series is another classic work embodying the traditional Chinese culture which begins with a prelude of spiritual homeland: mountains, rivers, seniors, females, flowers, birds, raptors, fish, worms, Chinese radishes and Chinese cabbage, etc. He integrated the traditional Chinese philosophy into modern spirit, carrying out the core spirit of the notion that "brush painting should keep its paces with the times". Other representatives are Gao Hui-min' general sketch of flowers and birds, Yu Zhi-xue's artistic school of ice and snow and Bai Jing-fu's "abandoning the west and adopting the Chinese; integrating the south with the north". These masters are and their ideas are the essence of Heilongjiang's artistic undertaking. It was their hard work and unremitting efforts that arouses the nationwide attention of the critics to Heilongjiang, a richly cultivating land for great artists. The study in regionality of Chinese painting is a positive subject and could be looked on as a core yardstick used to measure an artist's ability to sense life and build up a spiritual home. In summary, there is still a long way for us to go to blaze a cultural trail to nurture and develop our spirit of the Great Northern Wilderness.

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