

Problems and Strategies of the Inscriptions of Contemporary Chinese Paintings

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Abstract

Inscription is used as an important artistic means to enhance the expressiveness of the traditional Chinese paintings. With the change of the social and cultural life as well as the knowledge structure, there are some new features in the development of contemporary Chinese paintings. The importance of the inscription is neglected in most times, and there is also growing concern in the capacity of contemporary painters when it comes to inscription. For example, most painters just inscribe their names in paintings, and a variety of the styles of the inscriptions in traditional painting are on the verge of loss, which is aggravated by the sketch-based teaching system of Contemporary Chinese painting. For analyzing the problems existed in the Chinese paintings, this paper tries to find and propose solutions to provide some reference for the healthy development of contemporary Chinese paintings.

Key words: Contemporary; Chinese paintings; Inscription; Problems; Strategies

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INTRODUCTION

The inscription of Chinese painting serves as written words on the screen. Inscription, also known as “tikuan”, contains two aspects: “ti” and “kuan”, ti contains topic,

poetry, essays, creative ideas which express personal feelings. While kuan mainly includes the author’s real name and his alternative name, the creation time and place and so on. Due to the limitations of the writing level before the Five Dynasties, artists generally do not write on the screen so as not to damage the paintings. In Tang and early Song dynasty, most inscriptions in the small print are hidden in the grass between the stone roots or are written on the back of the painting. With the development of the literati painting in Song and Yuan Dynasties literati, the calligraphy of scholar painters is much better than that of previous painters and the former’s writing intention is much stronger. There formed an art form combined by poetry, calligraphy, painting and seal. In the era of the literati aesthetic ideals occupying the main position, the paintings inscribed with a lot of words become an important means of artistic expression, which greatly enhances the readability of the works, and cultivate the audience preference for this form as well. The writing and the rules of inscription are significant to the picture in the forms of beauty, and the content is directly related to the picture conception. Poetry and painting are two different forms of the art and have a lot of similarities in terms of emotional expression. While the inscriptions are not supposed to explain and illustrate paintings, and the picture always gets the mood without inscriptions. Therefore the main function of the inscription is to extend and enlarge the picture mood, conveying the outside meaning that is closely related to the picture.

However, the inscriptions of many contemporary Chinese paintings have seen greatly landslide compared to the previous ones. For example, in the 12th National Art Exhibition, most painters adopt a relatively simple inscription by only writing the title plus their names or even names alone in their works. Although some inscriptions are a lot of words, it is not relatively fluent and there are even some spelling errors, this phenomenon is not supposed to exist in the highest standard national art

exhibition like this. This paper tries to analyze the reasons for the formation of these phenomena and made some of its own proposals.

1. ANALYSIS OF THE DECLINED LEVEL OF THE INSCRIPTIONS OF CONTEMPORARY CHINESE PAINTINGS

Firstly, after the May Fourth Movement, vernacular and simplified characters as one of the hallmarks of the New Culture Movement, were rapidly gaining popularity in the whole country. To today, although having played an important role in advancing the various sectors of the society, it inevitably caused discontinuity between some classical Chinese culture and the contemporary civilization. Before May Fourth Movement the spirit of traditional Chinese culture whereby Chinese painting survived was criticized, and the talent evaluation criteria were greatly changed and the traditional cultural literacy is no longer important. Consequently, people with this capacity are become less and less with generations passed by, and they are good at modeling ability instead. In contemporary, people in east and west hold similar opinion towards aesthetic orientation on paintings, and the distinctions between the Chinese painting and the Western painting seem limited to tools and materials. Due to the fewness of the current artists with a high cultural level and cultural qualities many contemporary artists have been unable to make good use of Chinese characters. Many of today's artists do have the desire to make inscriptions in their works, but the poor literary skill falls short of their wishes, not to mention of creating their poems, difficulties can be found in correctly organizing a beautiful phrase in certain atmosphere. Therefore, writing some ancient poetry or part of it in the painting is a common practice, a few artists can recite them, which can be considered good, however, who could not recite only have to refer to books. These phenomena are more and more common and could be found in some pen clubs. It reveals that contemporary painters are short of literature capabilities. Therefore, the want of literary skills and accomplishment in contemporary Chinese painter is one of the causes for the landslide of contemporary Chinese paintings. Painters are not able to organize, edit, and even identify the content of the writing. As the saying goes, "one can not make bricks without straw." No wonder there are not good inscriptions under this circumstance. In China, solid skills and basic skills are essential to draw a good painting, that one only has the basics are not enough. Mood expression is the highest level of Chinese painting and the mood is from the real world and also a world in which artists reflect their soul. Traditional Chinese painters mostly can write poetry and calligraphy, do paintings and printings. They know how to take advantages of the interaction and relationship between poetry, calligraphy, paintings to create the

mood of Chinese paintings. And in the contemporary cultural diversity, Chinese painting art becomes a part of popular culture, especially after contacting with the market in recent years, and its ancient social responsibility has almost disappeared. For the painter, they become producers rather than cultural creators. They pay more attention to specific and real picture of pen and ink, modeling, and other various elements, while ignoring the mood creation. They are more indifferent to the inscription as an important tool to create the mood.

Secondly, with the development of the times, writing instruments has changed dramatically, the traditional brush was replaced by pen hailed from the West. Qin generals including Mongolia tied with fur front pens, made the first brush. It is very convenient for writing battle paper, and soon it will became popular, to today, it has become one of the most important tools for Chinese paintings. It varies in thousand forms for people to choose based on personal preferences and requirements. For evaluation of traditional Chinese paintings there has been a very important criterion – "pen", the so-called "ink". It means the traces left by the use of a brush on rice paper, these traces recorded changes of the pen and ink in this formulation. Ink has gone beyond mere technique concept, interpreting the Chinese art and Chinese culture from a higher spiritual point. It even contains many elements of Chinese philosophy. Different mentalities and emotions will be reflected in the use of a brush to draw lines and ink blocks. People now use the pen, pencil, gel pen, ball-point pen and so on. All of these pens are of Western origin. With the spread of computer input methods, the brush used by painters is no longer necessity for social life and study. It is rarely used unless in the condition of painting and calligraphy. Reduced time of using brushes has weakened the brush performance of contemporary Chinese painters. Compare to the ancient painters who dealt with brush all day the contemporary painters are naturally weaker in mastering the brush. (a) They have no much confidence in making inscriptions in their paintings; (b) even they have confidence they would not have the ability to do well. Therefore, another cause for the landslide of contemporary Chinese paintings is that brush as the representative of a soft pen tool is replaced by pen-writing instruments which are more convenient and efficient.

Thirdly, the addition of new paintings also brought chaos to contemporary Chinese paintings. Because of national differences, Chinese paintings and Western paintings are very different in methods of their own performance and techniques. Chinese culture consists mainly of three ideological connotations: Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. There has existed theory of "yes" and "no", "virtual" and "real" "for a long time, stressing "nothing" and "there is virtual reality". It emphasizes ink pen interest and do not occupy all the places. The author's emotions and accidental ink interesting changes occurring

organic combination of artificial and natural unity are formed on the screen. The place where to draw the picture is undoubtedly important, while those blank spaces are more important. As a result, Chinese painting in general becomes lighter, elegant. However, the Western paintings pay much attention to the performance of the entity and require a certain amount of space, texture and sense, making full use of scientific vision to observe research results. For the human visual is physics-based, it looks heavy, strong and there is no lack of weight feeling.

After painting, printmaking and other Western art form came to China, the traditional Chinese paintings have to be exhibited in the same hall with the Western paintings. Due to differences in materials and expression methods, oil paintings, block paintings and other paintings have obvious advantages in depicting shape and form whose sense of weight and visual impact is unmatched by the traditional Chinese paintings. Formerly they appreciate the drifting literati plot in a single painting, and now they gradually tend to compare different paintings from a relatively long distance. The change of habits forces Chinese paintings advance towards the direction conformed to the aesthetic rhythm of the times. Full, dense, darkness, deepness, fineness emerged as new features in contemporary Chinese painting. When the picture is full, the place where the inscription is supposed to be located is now occupied by other contents. Consequently, many artists could not find blank to inscribe long-lengthen words but only write a name after the completion of the work. In turn, if things go on like this as painters only write their names their brush-writing skills would be further exacerbated, the more they do not inscribe the more they would not be able to inscribe. Such vicious circle could just make the problem become more salient.

2. THE INFLUENCE OF CONTEMPORARY COLLEGE EDUCATION ON THE INSCRIPTIONS OF CHINESE PAINTINGS

Above factors leading to decline level of the inscription of Contemporary Chinese paintings has direct relations with the education of contemporary art schools.

Firstly, to become a painter in current days, most people have to participate in fine arts examinations and receive professional training in art schools. While the selection system and teaching mode adopted by art institutions are borrowed from the Western schooling system. In early 20th century, the modern New Schools gradually replaced the old-style private schools, the scientific and systematic teaching methods are gradually improved under the exploration, cultivating a lot of talents for the development of the society. However, for some time, there is obviously insufficient understanding in the

transmission of traditional culture. Built on the foundation of Western civilization the teaching mode has caused natural resentments among people against the classical Chinese culture. They just give an absolute negation whenever right or wrong. Subjectively choosing to ignore the accumulated traditional culture causes the dislocation between the culture of contemporary China and traditional paintings. Meanwhile, due to the influence of pragmatism, most schools simply pursuit the enrollment rate and evaluate students primarily based on the main subjects. Art lessons like bean sprouts. The class time is used, the full-time teachers are not available, the teaching goal is ignored, and the homework is not done. In this case, the knowledge structure is imbalance or even lacking among students.

In the field of art, students have to receive a large number of professional skill training, therefore they are unwillingly and have no time to learn the traditional culture, and before that class restriction in the primary, middle and high school make it impossible for students to know more about the traditional culture. Meanwhile, the exam-oriented education makes this issue become more complicated. Students with high test scores may not have needed skills. Various reasons result in a permanent lack of traditional literary foundation among contemporary Chinese painters which are real. And now almost every painter friends around me are catching up to learn the traditional culture. However, this can only be regarded as a case. If great changes are not to be made in teaching mode the promotion of whole academic education among creative talents who take in Chinese Painting could be very difficult.

Secondly, calligraphy education in art institutions does not get enough attention. Affected by the exam-oriented education, sketching is everything and is the basis of the plastic arts among painting, oil painting or other paintings. Such an approach of “one size fits all” sends a big blow to Chinese painting characterized by brush and ink. Due to the weakened calligraphy capacity the freehand brushwork, lyricism and writing features of contemporary Chinese paintings almost disappeared, and means to run rampant in order to produce the effect. Chinese paintings are not the original ones.

Sketch-based teaching model has also caused a change in the national spirit and aesthetic taste of modern Chinese painting. The traditional Chinese art as a representative of Chinese paintings could be said to be unique in the world history of art. It is influenced by Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism and other oriental culture in the long process of historical development, gradually forming its own artistic style and following their own art law of development. The sketch-based education model has artificially changed the basic elements of Chinese painting, making it more and more similar to the Western art style that the rate of whole and part perish has been greatly increased. If the art

form of traditional Chinese painting perished, it will bring a significant loss not only to Chinese culture but also to the field of human spirit, which we expect not to see. Therefore, it has been urgent to face up to the problem of inheritance of Chinese paintings.

3. PROPOSALS FOR RAISING THE LEVEL OF THE INSCRIPTIONS OF CONTEMPORARY CHINESE PAINTINGS

To raise the level of Contemporary Chinese paintings, I think, some points have to be taken into beings as follows.

Firstly, we should earnestly implement the quality education in Primary and Secondary School. We should spare some time and lessons for students to learn traditional Chinese culture, such as leading them to do more famous poetry reading and even encouraging them to create their own poetry if possible. As long as it is persevered, certainly will there be a good harvest. In addition, we should make the necessary adjustments on students' evaluation system and examination system, otherwise it must be too difficult to carry out the good wishes of quality education under the tough academic pressure.

Secondly, we should improve calligraphy qualities of people so that they can gain a lot of benefice. In primary school, calligraphy courses should be offered, guiding students to learn the origin of calligraphy and to practice calligraphy since childhood. In secondary school, practicing calligraphy skills should be promoted to a more important grade, cultivating students to develop good habits and characters on the base of improvement of their writing skills. In university, specialized calligraphy curriculum should be established. We should study on this ancient art form systematically and comprehensively and cultivate more professional calligraphy expertise. Along with the deepening of calligraphy education, the hand-writing level of the whole society will be improved subsequently, which is obviously beneficial to improve the level of inscriptions of contemporary Chinese paintings.

Thirdly, strengthening the sorting and research in the art works of inscriptions of Chinese paintings, on which though there are some papers concerned currently. However, the depth and breadth of these papers need to be strengthened. On one hand, the total number of papers is in small proportion. On the other hand, the research data is not very comprehensively. In recent years, we can see some of the monographs collecting painting poetry. However, due to the lack of data and the statistical difficulties the volume still can not meet the needs of research. Today's increasingly sophisticated Internet technology makes it possible for us to establish a more comprehensive and more complete database of inscriptions of Chinese paintings. No doubt, this requires a lot of capital and technology investment. Therefore,

attention and support from our country would play a significant role in promoting the research of inscription arts of Chinese paintings.

CONCLUSION

The combination of calligraphy and painting contributes to the unique appreciating model of Chinese paintings. Traditional Chinese paintings combined by poetry, calligraphy, painting and seal have become an important feature to appreciate Chinese paintings.

With the changes in the cultural environment and social aesthetic habits, the ways and words of inscriptions in Chinese paintings are bound to change. How to grasp the unique and essential characteristics of Chinese paintings featuring in combining calligraphy and painting is a significant issue facing contemporary Chinese painters.

Knowledge structure in contemporary has been very different from that of the ancient artists. It is clearly unrealistic and unnecessary to copy the ancient artist's growth patterns and aesthetic requirements. For painters, only being aware of the change of their knowledge structure and paying much attention to strengthening the literary accomplishment on the basis of tradition, while improving their writing skills and conducting a more in-depth research on the styles and forms of inscription of the paintings can they achieve further development in the inscriptions of contemporary Chinese painting on the existing basis.

The level of the inscription, in a sense, reflects inheritance of contemporary Chinese paintings of the traditional ones, the continuation of writing characteristics of Chinese paintings. Therefore, to enhance the level of contemporary Chinese paintings is undoubtedly very important and necessary for the development of Chinese paintings.

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