

The study of how to reflect philosophical ideas in paintings

Cheng Xinyue

United World College of Changshu China, Changshu, China

Chengxinyue309@163.com

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Abstract: This article aims to explore the ways in which philosophical ideas are reflected in different paintings and their significant importance. By analyzing different types of paintings such as traditional Chinese painting and Western painting, the close connection between painting and philosophy is revealed. As a form of artistic expression, painting can intuitively showcase philosophical ideas, and philosophical ideas also provide depth and connotation for painting creation. Studying the expression of philosophical ideas in paintings helps us better understand the value and significance of artistic works.

1. Introduction

As a unique art form, painting carries the thoughts and emotions of creators, while philosophy is a profound reflection on major issues such as the essence of the world and the meaning of life. The close connection between painting and philosophy stems from the common pursuit of human self-awareness and world understanding. Different paintings are like mirrors, reflecting the social landscape, cultural atmosphere, and personal philosophical thoughts of the author's era. [1]

In the long river of history, many great paintings contain profound philosophical ideas. For example, traditional Chinese painting often embodies the philosophical concept of "harmony between man and nature", emphasizing the harmonious unity between humans and nature. Painters use ink and brush to depict natural landscapes such as mountains, waters, flowers, and birds, expressing reverence and praise for nature, while also conveying a spiritual realm of pursuing inner peace and integrating with nature.

Western paintings also embody philosophical ideas. From the praise of human nature during the Renaissance to the challenge of traditional concepts in modernist painting, they all reflect the changes in people's understanding and ways of thinking about the world in different historical periods.

Exploring the relationship between painting and philosophy is of great significance. On the one hand, it can help us to have a deeper understanding of the connotation and value of painting works, and interpret the thoughts and emotions behind the images from a philosophical perspective. On the other hand, by analyzing the philosophical ideas in paintings, we can also better understand the philosophical trends and cultural backgrounds of different historical periods, providing us with new perspectives for studying the development of human thought.

2. The Foundation of the Relationship between Painting and Philosophy

2.1 The Influence of Traditional Philosophy on Painting

2.1.1 The embodiment of the concept of unity between heaven and man in painting

As a representative of traditional Chinese painting, traditional Chinese painting fully embodies the philosophical concept of "unity of heaven and man" [2]. In traditional Chinese painting, painters view humans and nature as an organic whole, pursuing a harmonious unity between humans and nature. For example, Jia Youfu talked about the "unity of heaven and man" in Chinese landscape painting, mentioning that many of the spiritual pursuits in Chinese landscape painting benefit from

the perception of natural sounds and images. Painters love, are familiar with, and have an affinity for nature. Through depicting nature, they integrate their emotions with it. Wang Wei's "travel to a place where the water is poor, sit and watch the clouds rise" and Liu Changqing's "look at the pine color after the rain, and follow the mountain to the water source" all reflect the ultimate embodiment of the Chinese philosophy of harmony and unity between man and nature in landscape painting. The landscape paintings of Fujian painter Liang Ming, with the themes of "Clearing the Mind and Observing Objects, Splashing Ink and Color" and "Scenery Following the Heart, Sketching Series", showcase grand momentum and profound artistic conception, reflecting the inheritance and development of the concept of "unity of heaven and man" by contemporary Chinese painters. [3]

2.1.2 The Influence of the Concept of Mutual Growth and the Virtue of a Gentleman

Taoist philosophy advocates the concept of "existence and non existence mutually arising" and emphasizes the role of "non existence". In painting, painters pursue the origin of the "Dao" of all things between similarity and dissimilarity, based on the concept of mutual existence and dissimilarity. Classical painters do not rely on the appearance of objects to achieve the experience of the "Dao". The Confucian concept of 'a gentleman should be virtuous' emphasizes the cultivation of inner morality. Natural landscapes are endowed with the meaning of nourishing, joyful, and free spirit. Limited life seeks the meaning of life from infinite nature, in order to achieve inner harmony of mind and spirit. Chinese ink painting utilizes the depth and intensity of ink to an unparalleled level, relying solely on simple lines of water and ink, white and black, to express the essence of classical Chinese painting. For example, in traditional Chinese painting, pine, bamboo, plum, chrysanthemum, lotus, etc. are used as symbols of a gentleman's style and perfect personality, and there are endless depictions of themes such as "Three Friends of Winter" and "Four Gentlemen".

2.2 The feedback effect of painting on philosophy

Painting works are not only influenced by philosophical ideas, but also play a positive role in the dissemination and understanding of philosophical ideas. Painting, with its intuitive imagery and rich expressive power, can transform abstract philosophical ideas into concrete visual images, making philosophy more accessible and understandable. For example, by appreciating traditional Chinese landscape paintings, the audience can more intuitively feel the connotations of philosophical ideas such as "unity of heaven and man" and "existence and non existence". Painters convey philosophical ideas through their paintings, allowing audiences to appreciate art while also being inspired by philosophy, thus better understanding and spreading philosophical ideas. Paintings have become an important carrier for the dissemination of philosophical ideas, contributing to the development and inheritance of philosophy.

3. The expression of philosophical ideas and techniques in different paintings

3.1 Philosophical Thoughts in Traditional Chinese Painting

3.1.1 Philosophical Connotation of Traditional Chinese Painting

The concept of "unity of heaven and man" in traditional Chinese painting is specifically reflected in the painter's close connection between nature and humans. Painters use delicate brushstrokes to depict natural landscapes such as mountains, waters, flowers, and birds, showcasing the beauty and mystery of nature while also incorporating their emotions and thoughts into it. For example, in some traditional Chinese painting works, painters use mountains and waters as the background to depict the activities of characters in nature, expressing a beautiful vision of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. This harmony is not only reflected in the composition of the picture, but also in the use of colors and the expressiveness of brushstrokes. Painters integrate the charm of nature into their works through observation and perception, allowing the audience to feel the power and beauty of nature.

The philosophical concept of "existence and non existence coexist" is manifested in traditional

Chinese painting as the painter's handling of the virtual and real in the painting. Painters create an artistic conception of the interplay between reality and virtuality through clever use of variations in the intensity of white space and ink. The blank space is not a vacuum, but filled with the flow of spiritual energy and life. The changes in the intensity of ink reflect the interplay and transformation of yin and yang in things. In some traditional Chinese paintings, painters use light ink to outline the contours of mountains and waters, and then use thick ink to dye the charm of mountains and waters, making the picture both layered and deep. This technique of combining reality and virtuality imbues traditional Chinese painting works with philosophical and artistic charm.

The idea of 'a gentleman should be virtuous' is reflected in traditional Chinese painting as the artist's personification of natural scenery. Painters have endowed natural scenery such as pine, bamboo, plum, and chrysanthemum with noble character and personality traits. For example, pine trees are seen as symbols of perseverance, bamboo as symbols of integrity, plum blossoms as symbols of fearlessness in the cold, and chrysanthemums as symbols of indifference to fame and fortune. Painters express their pursuit and longing for noble character through the depiction of these natural landscapes. At the same time, this personalized depiction also allows the audience to feel the moral power and spiritual connotation contained in natural scenery when appreciating traditional Chinese painting works.

3.1.2 Philosophical Reflections on Zhu's Traditional Chinese Painting

The true interest and rational interest in Zhu Guoguo's paintings reflect his profound understanding of life and nature. True interest is the authentic meaning, representing the artist's unique perception of life. Zhu Guoguo emphasized that true interest is the key to the success of an artist's career, as it imbues their works with vitality and infectiousness. Li Qu is a philosophical interpretation of the objective laws of the occurrence, development, and change of things, as well as life, society, and even the entire natural world, based on the foundation of true Qu. In Zhu Guoguo's works, the fusion of truth and reason gives the images both vivid expressiveness and profound ideological connotations.

The philosophy of unity of object and self in Zhu Guoguo's paintings inherits the aesthetic concept of "observing objects". His freehand flower and bird paintings do not directly depict the principles of objects, but rather project his own emotions onto the depicted objects while observing them. In this way, Zhu Guoguo achieved the realm of unity between the object and the self, making the flowers and birds in his works not only a representation of natural scenery, but also an expression of the artist's inner world. The philosophical idea of the unity of self and object has endowed Zhu's flower and bird paintings with profound cultural heritage and spiritual connotations.

In addition, Zhu Guoguo's paintings follow the principles of bone style brushwork and pictographic representation, which is consistent with the "Six Laws" theory in ancient Chinese painting aesthetics. His profound understanding and mastery of form and structure reflect his philosophical ideas. Overall, Zhu Guoguo's works pursue an artistic realm of harmony, unity, and both form and spirit, which is in line with the concept of "harmony" in traditional Chinese aesthetics. At the same time, Zhu Guoguo's works have boldly innovated on the basis of inheriting tradition, forming his own unique artistic style that echoes the concept of "change" in traditional Chinese philosophy.

3.2 Philosophical Expressions in Western Painting

3.2.1 Philosophical themes of Gauguin's paintings

Gauguin's work 'Where Do We Come from? Who Are We? Where Are We Going?' raises a series of profound philosophical questions. This work expresses humanity's exploration of the origin of life through primitive depiction techniques. In the picture, several images resembling primitive humans surround a central figure in the primitive forest, conveying Gauguin's thoughts on the origin and fate of humanity. [4]

From the theme of the painting, Gauguin utilized images of primitive forests and primitive humans, returning to the most primitive state of humanity. This depiction of returning to nature

expresses his criticism of modern society and his yearning for primitive and simple life. In terms of emotional expression, Gauguin conveyed his exploration of the origin and fate of humanity, as well as his criticism of modern society and longing for primitive and simple life through his paintings.

Gauguin's work conveys philosophical reflections on human existence and destiny through its unique artistic techniques and thematic choices. It guides people to re-examine their origins and the meaning of their existence, and to think about how to live more authentically and fundamentally.

3.2.2 Philosophical Metaphors in the Works of Klee and Ernst

Klee's 'The Limits of Intelligence' portrays a modern critique of rationalism through the scene of a delicate and fragile building rising towards a huge orange red sun that can never be reached. Klee found a poetic metaphor for the "inadequacy of reason," as Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote, "The atheist owl, with its blue rimmed eyes, turns a blind eye to the dazzling sun, crying out: Where is it?" Klee's work reflects on scientists' confidence in completeness and their arrogance, reflecting their contemplation of the limitations of reason. [5]

Ernst's 'Dripping Little Tears' mocked the vitalists. In this work, tears were originally an irretrievable symbol of human emotions, but here they become mechanical reactions, flowing out under appropriate stimulation from simple and regular automata like watches. Ernst expressed his criticism of the sentimentality that opposes reason in this way, and also sparked people's thinking about the relationship between human emotions and mechanical reactions.

The works of Klee and Ernst both use unique artistic techniques and philosophical metaphors to bring profound reflection and inspiration to the audience. Their works not only have artistic value, but also reflect the philosophical trends and social realities of the time, providing us with a new perspective for studying the development of human thought.

4. Concrete examples of expressing philosophical ideas in paintings

4.1 Wang Jiachun's Philosophy in Chinese Painting

The Chinese paintings created by Wang Jiachun have lofty artistic conception, such as "The person who can lean against the wall to read a leisurely book must be very happy in their heart". This painting reflects a philosophical idea of satisfying and cherishing a simple life. In the fast-paced modern society, people are often busy pursuing material wealth and fame, while neglecting their true inner happiness. This painting conveys that happiness can be very simple through a simple scene, where a person leans against a wall reading a leisurely book. It does not require excessive material or external achievements, as long as one is satisfied internally, they can feel happiness.

The so-called happiness is when the eyes lift upwards to magnify happiness; the so-called annoyance is when the eyes lower to magnify annoyance. "This painting embodies a philosophical idea that mentality determines feelings. By comparing the different outcomes of looking up and down with one's eyes, it is important to learn how to adjust one's mindset and approach life positively and optimistically. The painting vividly presents this philosophical idea through concise images and text, allowing the audience to deeply reflect on their own mentality and attitude towards life while appreciating the painting.

4.2 Joseph Novak's Absurd Illustrations

Joseph Novak's illustration work "Fertility" may seem absurd, but it contains profound reflections on the origin and growth of life. This painting may use exaggerated techniques to present the process of life's gestation in a unique way, arousing the audience's reverence for life and contemplation of its meaning.

The illustration of the centipede cleaning socks may be understood as an exaggeration and mockery of trivial matters in daily life. It may imply that people are often troubled by seemingly insignificant things in their busy lives and overlook more important things. Through this absurd scene, it reminds people to learn to let go of trivial matters and focus on the essence of life.

4.3 Buddhist philosophical paintings of Nirvana and Blue

The work 'Nirvana' embodies the philosophical ideas of Buddhism about the retribution of good and evil, desire and pain, liberation and rebirth. Through the depiction of the karmic consequences caused by the actions, words, and thoughts of sentient beings, as well as the expression of escaping ignorance, breaking free from the six cycles of reincarnation, and entering the realm of eternal silence, the painting conveys reflections on desires and pain, as well as the pursuit of liberation and rebirth. Images may use symbolic and metaphorical techniques, such as specific colors, images, etc., to present these philosophical ideas.

Blue "expresses the philosophical idea of purifying the soul and pursuing inner freedom in a society where materialism prevails, using the symbol of freedom - blue. The depiction of flying dragons and other images in the picture, as well as the expression of purifying the body and mind and seizing current opportunities, may convey a wise pursuit of rationality and spiritual release.

4.4 Paul's humorous illustrations

Paul's illustration work "The heavy workload makes people feel like they are being kidnapped by the computer" reflects the reflection on people's excessive work pressure and loss of freedom in modern society. The painting uses exaggerated techniques to depict people as being kidnapped by computers, intuitively portraying the constraints of work on people and prompting the audience to reflect on work life balance.

The illustration conveys a philosophical idea of the conflict between ideals and reality, with the line 'Heart towards light, but every step is a thorn'. The contrast between light and thorns in the picture may express the difficulties and challenges people face on the path of pursuing their ideals, while also suggesting that people should have the courage to face difficulties and persist in pursuing their own ideals.

5. Conclusion

Painting works are closely connected to philosophical ideas, and the two influence and promote each other. Philosophical ideas provide profound connotations and creative inspiration for paintings, while paintings present philosophical ideas in intuitive visual form, making them easier to understand and spread.

In painting works, the presentation of philosophical ideas is rich and diverse. Traditional Chinese painting integrates humans and nature through the concept of "harmony between man and nature", showcasing the beauty of harmony; The concept of "existence and non existence" enables painters to pursue the origin of all things between similarity and dissimilarity, creating an artistic conception of the interplay between reality and virtuality; The idea of 'a gentleman is virtuous' endows natural scenery with personality traits and expresses noble character. In Western painting, Gauguin's works deeply contemplate the origin and fate of humanity, while Klee and Ernst's works reflect on the limitations of reason and human emotions through unique metaphors. In addition, Wang Jiachun's philosophical Chinese paintings, Joseph Novak's absurd illustrations, Buddhist philosophical paintings, and Paul's humorous illustrations all convey different philosophical ideas in their respective ways.

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