

Developing in Contradiction: from the Perspective of Dialectic Analysis to the Change of Chinese Modern Art Thoughts

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Abstract:

During the period of “New Culture Movement”, after Marx’s thoughts and theories were introduced into China, all aspects of Chinese culture were affected, and art could not be immune. The introduction of western art system brought the trend of improvement of traditional Chinese painting and shook the status of the traditional painting value system. Chen Duxiu, the leader of the “new culture movement”, proposed that the Wang’s painting needs a revolution; Chen Shizeng, praised by Liang Qichao as “the first person of modern art”, published the “value of literati painting” to defend the traditional Chinese painting... From opposition, exploration to unification, some sticking to Chinese tradition, various ideas collide in communication, forming a unique chapter in Chinese art.

Keywords:

Modern China, Dialectics, Art Thoughts

1. Introduction

The dialectical analysis of Marxism is the basic scientific methodology to study human culture. It is universal in all cultural studies and is the basis of other scientific and cultural methodologies. Dialectic analysis is based on dialectical materialism and historical materialism as the philosophy, and is the application of materialist dialectics in cultural research [1]. Dialectics points out that “universal connection with all things” and “eternal development according to their own laws” are two general basic characteristics of the world existence, which reveal the dialectical nature of the world; the contradictory view (the unity of opposites) is the core of dialectics.

Confucius said that “traveling in art”, and the concept of “traveling in art” has basically marked the trend of Chinese art. Since then, Chinese painting has been developing along this road. There may be many forks in the process of development, but the overall direction of progress has remained unchanged. Chinese painter has been painting as a way of literati recreation, NiZan “Write about the joy in your heart” has become the artistic pursuit of later literati painters, more ancient painting theory, later generations to inherit the development of predecessors. Since ancient times,

painting for entertainment is noble, painting for life is cheap, which means ancient art is valuable because it is an adjust to culture. Until modern times, the painting side really has the artistic consciousness. Chinese painting form seems to be unchanged, but in fact the language of painting is in constantly rich and change. However, the receptivity of Chinese painting culture is different from that of western culture, in addition to the introduction of Buddhism culture on Chinese culture, Chinese painting for a long time is still the painting tradition since the Song dynasty, few artists far from the tradition. After the late Qing Dynasty, many western people who studied abroad brought the creative concept of western painting to China, which created a new way of examining Chinese art.

This paper aims to review the development trend of Chinese modern art ideological trend with dialectical analysis method, and to see how the ideological trend of Chinese modern art ideological trend moves forward in the contradiction through the viewpoint of unity of opposites.

2. Exploration of Modern Painting

The Opium War opened the prelude to the modern Chinese history, followed by the collapse of the Chinese concept of heaven for thousands of years. Groups of Chinese students went to the West to study, and the values of traditional culture were walking on thin ice in the turbulent era. After the defeat of the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895, China really realized its backwardness, and the centrism of the Qing Empire gradually disintegrated, so the politics, economy and culture all began to learn from the West. After the Republic of China, western thought and culture had a profound influence on China. During the May 4th Movement, “Mr.Democracy” and “Mr.Science” became the main leading thoughts of the society. Under the great background and trend of the times, the art as a superstructure could not be immune. In modern times, traditional painting, just like Chinese society, declined to the point of inevitable reform, so the Chinese people re-expressed their traditional painting and calligraphy, and called it “traditional Chinese painting” and “Literati painting”, as if they want to draw a clear line with the West. However, it is precisely because of the boundaries and differences that there are places to absorb and reference, and modern art finally went to the road of learning from the West. [2]

Chinese painting reached its peak in the Song Dynasty, and began to go downhill after the Song Dynasty. In the Yuan Dynasty, Zhao Mengfu put forward the theory of “ancient meaning”, which was followed by the later generations. The thought of “painting has no ancient meaning, a good work is useless” created the prosperity of literati painting. In the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, Dong Qichang put forward the “theory of the North and South Sect” and divided the paintings into the Southern sect and the Northern sect. In order to praise the Southern sect, Dong and his later generations admired the south and suppressed the north. From then on, the Southern sect painting became the authentic Chinese painting. In the early Qing Dynasty, the “Four named Wang” followed Dong Qichang’s theory, and pursued “antique” and “ancient meaning” in painting, and their orthodox status continued until the late Qing Dynasty. “The Spring and Autumn Annals” said: “Extreme things will reverse”, Chinese painting in the end of the Qing Dynasty eventually declined. Wang Hui sighed in “Qing Hui painting postscript”: “Wuhu! The painting has fallen declined!” It can be said that the ancient Chinese painting has not been a subversive change, which is the reason for its decline, and by the late Qing Dynasty has already declined to the point where it has to change.

From the late Qing Dynasty to the Republic of China, with the criticism of the orthodox “four named Wang” of the Qing Dynasty, the trend of thought of revisiting the history of painting appeared in the painting circle. Many scholars published their opinions on how to develop Chinese painting in the late Qing Dynasty in the form of articles or works. Kang Youwei advocated “update with retro” and advocated Tang and Song painting; Chen Duxiu proposed the fine-art revolution in his reply to LvCheng; Chen Shizeng defended the status of literati painting; Huang Binhong summarized the painting of various dynasties and protected the tradition; Lin Fengmian, Gao Jianfu and Xu Beihong proposed the view of improving Chinese painting. Although different views, even opposite, their purpose is the revival of Chinese painting. The modern Chinese painting world has been seeking unity in confrontation and moving forward in contradiction. It is the tit-for-tat of different views that makes the flowers of the modern Chinese painting world bloom together.

There are three main voices in modern Chinese painting ideas, one is to learn from the West, represented by Kang Youwei, Xu Beihong and Chen Duxiu, the second is to refuse to learn from the West, advocating the gap between China and Western, represented by Chen Shizeng, Pan Tianshou, the third is to compromise, advocating the harmony of Chinese and Western, with Gao Jianfu, Gao Qifeng, Lin Fengmian and other representatives.

3. The Contradiction Analysis of Modern Painting Thought

The core of dialectics is that everything is in a contradictory relationship and develops in the contradiction. The ideological trend of modern Chinese painting is no exception. The author mainly analyzes the modern painting thought and why it is contradictory, and how to develop in the contradiction.

Kang Youwei was one of the first historians to put forward the improvement of traditional Chinese painting. After the failure of the 1898 Restoration, he fled to Europe and America and visited many museums, and he was deeply impressed by Western classicism. He said in “Wanmu thatched Cottage”, “I dare to say that the painting of the Song Dynasty was the most of the earth before the fifteenth century, and a wise man can prove it. We should search Song paintings’ for their origin, so that our people know what we should do [3].” Therefore, he compared the Western classicism to propose the “Update with retro” to oppose the orthodox painting with the “four named Wang” as the core. Kang Youwei discussed the “Four named Wang” in “mu Cottage”: “Chinese painting has declined since the Qing Dynasty”. Not only decline, so far the county not heard of people. Its remaining two or three famous, copy the “four named Wang”, two stone dross, several dry pen, taste with chewing wax, after its recovery, it is comparable to today’s Europe, America, Japan? “Four named Wang”, two named Shi, slightly stored the brushstrokes of Yuan Dynasty painters, not the authentic Tang and Song dynasties, and worse than in Song Dynasty, this is beyond discussion. [4] It can be seen that Kang Youwei’s improvement theory of traditional Chinese painting is that he believed that freehand brushwork was declining after the Yuan Dynasty and cannot be comparable to Western classicism. He advocated that Chinese painting should return to the realistic state of the Tang and Song Dynasties, believing that Chinese painting itself is realistic, and only needs to return to the authentic Tang and Song Dynasties to save the slight decline of traditional Chinese painting. Although he praised the western realistic techniques, he did not actually advocate completely learning Western methods of painting. He believed that the development of traditional Chinese painting should integrate Chinese

and Western painting and improve the freehand brushwork of Chinese painting with western realism [5]. The “four named Wang” advocated “ancient” was opposed by Kang Youwei, and the “four named Wang” imitated the paintings of Yuan and Ming Dynasties. In fact, Kang Youwei’s thought also has the nature of “antique”, but the antique he pursues is further away than the “four named Wang”, which means that Kang Youwei’s thought is contradictory. However, its advanced nature lies in that he compared the realism of ancient Chinese painting with the western realism, pointing out that China has a realistic painting, which is unique. Kang’s “combination of China and the West for a New Era” refers to western classicism, but in the 20th century, classicism had declined, and the western world was already dominated by modernism. His contradiction lies in that he only sees the one-sided western art, not the whole Western culture. Under modernism, western painting has also moved to abstraction and lost realism.

Modern Chinese art must talk about is Chen Duxiu’s “Fine-art revolution” theory. Chen Duxiu was the leader of the “New Culture Movement”. Chen Duxiu received a letter from Lv Cheng talking about art reform at the end of 1918. Later, he wrote back to publish the slogan of “Fine-art Revolution” in the “New Youth” in January 1919. In the letter, he said: “If you want to improve Chinese painting, we have to revolutionize Wang’s painting. Because of the improvement of Chinese painting, we cannot but use the realistic spirit of foreign painting.[6]” Chen Duxiu’s view is similar to Xu Beihong, but Chen Duxiu’s thought only provides a forward direction for us to improve the traditional Chinese painting techniques, he did not specifically give a specific and feasible way to improve the Chinese painting. However, as Chen Duxiu was the main leader of China’s New culture movement at that time, his words also had a certain degree of authority in China at that time. The so-called “Fine-art revolution” theory, which he himself strongly advocated also played an important influence in the political circles at that time, which would inevitably affect the whole painting circle. However, the painter who can give some specific improvement measures in the Chinese painting session is Xu Beihong. Xu Beihong’s theory has been widely spread in the theoretical circle.

Xu Beihong was Kang Youwei’s student. Xu Beihong had a high talent for painting when he was young. He made a living by selling paintings at the age of thirteen. At the age of 20, he went to Shanghai and study in Aurora University by friends’ help, which laid a language foundation for his future stay in France. During this period, he met Kang Youwei, Cai Yuanpei. And then he studied in Japan, and after returning to China, he went to study in Paris again. Xu Beihong’s thoughts were influenced by Kang Youwei, he also said “The decline of Chinese painting has been serious up to now [7].” In addition, his teacher was a classical master when he studying in France, and his education had always been the one of Western painting, so he advocated realism all his life. When he returned, he actively engaged in the art education of Western realism; on the other hand, he also pursued his own practice of Chinese painting. In his artistic concept, Chinese painting at that time was no longer enough to compete with western art, so he moved the western painting education concept to China and proposed that “sketch is the basis of all plastic arts”. Xu Beihong’s “sketch theory” is the most influential painting theory in modern times. It should be pointed out that Xu Beihong had a good traditional Chinese painting and cultural foundation before studying abroad. Therefore, Xu Beihong is based on his deep understanding of Chinese painting and Chinese culture, so while advocating western painting, he also pointed out that “the best ancient law should keep, the dying should be inherited, the

poor should be corrected, the not enough should be added, good western painting can be integrated with China.” This is his conclusion based on the differences between Chinese painting and western painting. But Xu Beihong obviously has its contradiction, his whole life is advocated sketch and realistic, put forward the “sketch is the basis of all modelling art” theory, also the sketch the realistic training is strictly implemented to his school art education process, requires his school all students must do so. However, he most appreciated modern Chinese famous artists such as Qi baishi, Fu Baoshi, Huang Binhong who are not good at sketch, even don’t have the characteristics of realistic painting. Moreover, he advocated realism, but opened up the horse’s freehand brushwork, with a few strokes to write the horse’s high spirit and the ancient gentleman’s demeanor [8]. It is also to see his contradictions.

Xu Beihong only advocated learning western classical art, but sniffed at western modern art. Liu Haisu, Xu Zhimo and others advocated learning western modern art. The Shanghai Training School of Fine Arts College founded by Liu Haisu, Wu Shiguang and others is committed to the introduction of western modernist art. Liu Haisu advocates western modern art and it’s can be seen in his painting. He opposed the use of reason to analyze art, believing that if reason is used to analyze art, art will become skilled and the interest in art will be lost. They also advocated the improvement of Chinese painting with western art, but Xu Beihong and Liu Haisu made different choices, which led to their continuous debate, the most famous one is the “debate of two Xu”. This is the contradiction between the schools of learning. Xu Beihong’s starting point is to introduce western technology to change the status of the decline of Chinese painting, while Liu Haisu believes that the modern western painting theory is more worthy of reference. The author believes that for the cultural state at that time, western modernism was too avant-garde for the people to accept. However, it is undeniable that both Xu Beihong and Liu Haisu have made contributions to the history of Chinese modern art. It is their contradictions that promote the continuous development of fine art and write a new chapter for Chinese modern art.

In addition to the contradiction between the theories of learning Western technique, there is also the contradiction between learning Western technique and opening the gap between China and Western country. Chen Shizeng and Pan Tianshou are the main representatives of opening the gap between China and Western country.

Chen Shizeng once studied in Japan and majored in museology. Although he has experience studying abroad, perhaps because he is a master of Chinese painting and his profound family culture, he thinks the value of Chinese painting is no doubtful. The so-called Chinese painting regression theory or fine-art revolution theory is actually put forward for the literati painting. He gave different opinions on the decline of Chinese painting, the improvement of Chinese painting and the art revolution, and redefined the literati painting with the article “The Value of Literati Painting [9]”, which truly defended the status of literati painting. Chen had also very close attention to western modernism, he noticed that western modernism is not concrete realistic, he was keenly aware that literati painting pay attention to emotional expression and western expressionism, symbolism has the same, represents the advanced art thought, and literati painting appeared in the 13th century, western modernism in the 19th century, from this point China is walking before the west, this made a strong defense for literati painting.

Pan Tianshou, as an art historian, put forward the “mixed theory”. He said: “The most glorious era in history is the era of mixing. Why? Because of the invasion of its foreign culture, and the inherent special national spirit, the subtle combination of each other, produce a strange brilliance.” [10] From this paragraph, it can be seen that Pan Tianshou supports the theory of the integration of Chinese and Western painting. However, as a painter, he advocated that “Chinese and Western painting need to open the gap”, which is undoubtedly contradictory. If Pan Tianshou’s theory is considered from different identities, a unity can be found for this contradiction. As a historian, Pan Tianshou’s vision must be long-term, his “mixed theory” is put forward based on the perspective of history, modern China suffered so many hardships, all from the “closed country”, so from the perspective of history, Pan Tianshou recognized that culture needs to communicate, need to learn from each other. However, as a master of traditional Chinese painting, his choice is to stand in his time. Out of his responsibility for the Chinese culture at that time, he proposed to “open the gap” to avoid cultural colonialism, so his theory is both opposite and unified.

In addition to the two opposing views, there is another view of “reconciliation”, which is called the “The compromise faction”. The representative scholar is Gao Jianfu, Gao Qifeng and Lin Fengmian.

Gao Jianfu and Gao Qifeng are the representatives of the Lingnan Faction of Painting. “Lingnan faction of Painting” is located in Guangzhou, Guangdong is located between inland and overseas, and is also a trade port, suitable for the development of a culture between inland and Marine culture. Therefore, the Lingnan Faction of Painting opposed complete adherence to tradition and complete learning from the West. They advocated a “subtle combination.” [11] It’s to absorb the strengths of the East and the West into one place. Lin Fengmian’s thought and Lingnan school of similar, he advocated “harmony of Chinese and Western”, but Lin Fengmian and Lingnan school of harmony is very different, Lingnan school believed that to retain the “Verve” in Chinese painting and enrich Chinese painting with the form of western painting; Lin Fengmian thinks the spirit of Western modernism is desirable, to borrow the spiritual part of Chinese and Western painting to enrich Chinese painting. Their views have both contradictions and unity, but their starting point is to change the declining status of Chinese painting.

4. Conclusions

Dialectic analysis has universal applicability, and it is feasible to apply dialectical analysis to the study of the development of modern art. The trend of modern Chinese art is constantly developing in the contradiction. After the early Qing Dynasty, the theory of painting was flourishing, and the real innovators were rare [12]. It was not until the modern times that a new fashion of painting theory really appeared. Although many views could be argued, it was the difficult debate that promoted the vigorous and upward development of modern art.

Conflicts of Interest

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