

A Study On the Creation of Contemporary Poetic Sculpture from the Perspective of the Spirit of Traditional Chinese Painting and Calligraphy Brushwork

Geng Li^{1*}

¹ International College, Krirk University, Bangkok, Thailand

Email Address

2464077366@qq.com (Geng Li)

*Correspondence: 2464077366@qq.com

Received: 2 October 2022; **Accepted:** 17 October 2022; **Published:** 9 November 2022

Abstract:

Throughout the traditional Chinese painting and calligraphy, the art of painting and calligraphy can be described as extensive and profound, and freehand brushwork comes from the context of “imagery”, while the language of imagery also influences the development of Chinese sculpture. The current situation of both art ecology and popular culture is in fact close to the actual problems and development trends of our lives, and in this environment, new concepts and techniques in the creation of contemporary sculpture have greatly enriched the profound imagery language of their works. In such an environment, contemporary Chinese sculpture can grasp the language of imagery and create better. The expression of the language of imagery in sculpture from the perspective of the spirit of brush and ink in painting and calligraphy is summarized in different expressions, with more emphasis on the unique charm of the work in addition to the shape. The famous modern calligrapher and painter Mr. Qi Baishi emphasized the core concept of his creation, which is to focus on the interest of brush and ink, while the presentation of the image is the pursuit of “between likeness and unlikeness”, so the spirit of writing is the essence of Chinese painting and calligraphy, as the aesthetic core of Chinese painting, casting a unique way of thinking and spiritual character of traditional painting and calligraphy. Unlike painting, sculpture is a three-dimensional art which relies on physicality, volume and texture to move the viewer, and the two are intertwined. The author believes that there may be more possibilities for creative expression in the form of “mud and ink”. Today, the core concept of contemporary sculpture incorporates the spirit of Chinese calligraphy, calligraphic culture and artistic meteorology into the form of sculpture. The freehand of painting and calligraphy in sculpture, an ancient art that carries the cultural lineage of the Chinese nation, is of great reference and relevance to understanding Chinese civilization and guiding the development of current trends in artistic creation. In this paper, we will explore the spiritual core of the written sculpture by combining imaginative language in sculpture creation with the art of painting and calligraphy.

Keywords:

Calligraphy And Painting, Qi Rhyme, Poetry, Image Sculpture, Imagery Language

1. Introduction

We are familiar with Chinese painting, which often expresses subjects such as landscapes, figures, flowers and birds in a realistic manner, with a vivid atmosphere. For example, Liang Kai's *Painting of an Immortal with Splashed Ink* splashed on the paper, with a few strokes of the brush, is very open and expansive, with an emphasis on the intention and interest of the brush and ink. At the same time, the art of calligraphy also has Mi Fu's "*On My Modest Room*", "*Le Brother Post*", "*Prelude To Water Melody in Mid-autumn*" and so on through the gas lyrical works. His calligraphic conception is based on the idea of "meaning", with an emphasis on the mood of the brush. Freehand brushwork not only refers to the author himself to write out a symbolic image. The work is through another kind of expression, and in fact "write" the process of the writer himself has a certain life mood and some kind of thought. Chinese painting and calligraphy is no doubt a kind of unrestrained "image". The intention comes before the brush, the emotion is full and passionate, and this emotion also includes the imagery. Qi Baishi's creation advocated the "between likeness and unlikeness", which was known as the highest level of Chinese painting at the time, and this was also an expression of Qi's emphasis on the mood of his brushwork and ink, as well as the imagery of his objects.

2. Materials and Methods

As an ancient plastic art, sculpture carries with it a rich historical heritage and human spirituality. It is known in the art world as a "frozen chronicle" and as a "frozen dance". Using a variety of media and expressive tools, artists can create a series of visual and palpable art images with a certain degree of imagination through their own unique knowledge of traditional techniques and aesthetic art appreciation experience, in order to express a comprehensive art that reflects the reality of social life, expresses the artist's inner feelings of special aesthetic values, the pursuit of aesthetic art emotions and personal aspirations. We also know that sculpture is a process of addition and subtraction through the use of sculptural materials, shaping and sculpting to express a certain theme, thus achieving the ultimate goal of art. Nowadays, people are using the brush as a tool to express and interpret the concept of "imagery".

Both sculpture and Chinese painting have a long history of creation, from the Northern Wei and Han dynasties to early Japanese art, and have had a profound influence on the development of art as a whole, opening up a new path of modern Chinese sculptural style [1]. One might ask, "How can we view Chinese sculpture in a 'image' way?" In fact, ancient Chinese sculpture already had a sense of freehand in the primitive period. During the Han dynasty, the traditional sculpture of our folklore was at its peak, and during the Western Han dynasty, Huo Qubing, the great general of the Hussar, had made a great contribution to the fight against the long-standing aggression of the Western Xiongnu, and it was during the Han dynasty that Emperor Wu of Han designed and built his tomb, called Huo Qubing's Tomb, to commemorate and honour his great achievements. Fourteen animal stone sculptures exist, including *Crouching Tiger* and *Horses Stepping on Xiongnu*, especially *Horses*

Stepping on Xiongnu, which visually reveals the theme of the Han dynasty's victory in battle against the Xiongnu [2]. In terms of natural stone, a large number of high quality natural granite stones from across the country have been carefully selected and used in the traditional Chinese technique of "rock modelling", which is based on the surface texture and structure of the natural stone and the overall contours of the original rock structure, as well as the undulating and changing characteristics of its own volume. The lines are designed to be concise and general, thus fully revealing the unique sense of natural richness. The combination of round carving, relief carving techniques and natural line engraving not only reflects its ancient and heavy shape, but also show its grand and strong, full of its majestic momentum. This stone carving technique uses a unique carving technique to symbolize the allegorical basis and the combination of the means of the image of the situation, that is, it is the perfect combination of ancient painting and ancient sculpture. It gives the stone a strong passion for life to write history with a kind of life energy, and the style of stone carving at Huo's tomb undoubtedly confirms that it is another important and unique representative of the "imagery" style of sculpture in the Han dynasty in China [3]. Thus, these stone sculptures and many other symbolic sculptures in China with the style of imagery are aesthetic forms formed by the exchange of emotions and judgments between people and sculptures, and this wise and varied sculpture is also a symbolic epitome of the time. But in the end, its core lies in the imaginative expression of sculpture, the imagery language of sculpture becomes the basis for the appreciation and creation of sculpture, forming the trend of aesthetic ideals.

As the cultures of East and West collide, more and more works are diversifying, and innovation in language and materials, as well as innovation in concept, has become a key topic of discussion for sculptors. The sculptor's creative practice focuses on the intention of the creative subject and the spiritual connotation of social aesthetics conveyed by the language of artistic imagery, striving to better convey the spiritual dimension of his work through the language of abstraction. The sculpture itself is presented in space, and in the face of the natural medium. The sculptor puts thought and emotion into it to give life to the shape and rhythm of the material, to achieve the unity of heaven and man, and the oblivion of things. Professor Shang Xiaofeng, the former director of the sculpture studio of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, once said in a sculpture class that sketching is freehand, not realistic. Understand the concept of "lump", to feel the subjective shape, and shape it. The model in life drawing is a sculpture, not a human body, and should be written with the intention of "empty eyes, free mind and solid hands". Therefore, it can be seen that "shape" is "form", and "form" is "image", so we should grasp the properties of the material and put our thoughts and passion into it. In this process, we need to continuously refine and transform them into a fine image with spiritual connotation and emotion. Only in this way can the viewer be able to appreciate and feel the space, and be able to be present and empathize with it. In 2002, Wu Weishan, the director of the National Art Museum of China, boldly proposed the poetic concept of painting and calligraphy as sculpture, so that the creation of modern sculpture in China is no longer just a mere imitation of the West, but incorporates the concept of modern painting and calligraphy into the field of modern sculpture, reflecting the in-depth reflection on the traditional Chinese painting and culture and the revival of the concept of modern Chinese sculpture [4]. It is mentioned in Zhou Yi The elephant is the one who gives the idea; the one who speaks is the one who understands the elephant; the idea is better than the elephant, the one who gets the elephant and forgets the words, the one who gets the elephant so as to keep the idea, the one who gets the idea and forgets the elephant [5].

It is from this theoretical system that we are able to explain the dialectical opposition between meaning, image and speech, and therefore this book is actually meant to ask us artists to pay attention to the process of art creation and aesthetic experience in life, and to pay attention to the transcendence of concrete objects. The art of image sculpture is in fact the creation of an image in the intention, and the viewer, in appreciating the sculpture, will interact with the sculpture in order to interpret it, to experience and feel the profound connotation and spirit of the work of art. For example, Professor Wang Dongling of the China Academy of Art has incorporated the art of cursive writing into his installations, using the beauty of lines to create a dynamic and interesting space, which is an experiment and a breakthrough. Contemporary sculptors are increasingly concerned with the role of traditional culture and are pursuing a different approach to expressing a mood. The artistic mood of the sculptures has reached a kind of unity of nature, the unity of heaven and man, and the absence of self in the sculpture. As the great painter Zhang Zao of the Tang dynasty said, “The outside world learns from creation, while the middle world learns from the heart”, and sculptures with a sense of mood are more realistic and beautiful[6]. With the involvement of these emotional consciousnesses, the sculpture achieves spiritual sublimity and resonance.

Secondly, the imagery in sculpture is predicated on the study and judgement of the properties of form and material, for example, Greek sculpture often uses statues of equal size to express the spiritual ideal of man himself, which is similar to the *Terracotta Warriors and Horses* of the Qin Emperor. It can be seen that different proportions of volume and size give rise to different contexts of form and imagery[7]. The common materials used in sculpture are stone, metal, wood, glass, steel and plaster, but there are also many artists who experiment with integrated materials and industrial materials in an attempt to express more possibilities. The careful selection and exquisite processing of materials is the basis of sculptural beauty and the specific core of the imagery expression of sculptural materials. Metal such as stainless steel and cast bronze convey the beauty of metallic texture and craftsmanship, while wood and stone sculptures convey the beauty of simplicity and elegance, which are in fact concrete reflections of material imagery, making their works more warm and vivid. At the same time, in contemporary urban sculpture, especially engineering sculpture, it is found that some do not pay attention to the language of sculpture, the indiscriminate use of materials, there is a tendency to disregard the study of material properties, which is not rigorous, and is not responsible for the performance, but only to make the finished product delivery, regardless of the sculpture material needs of time, space and environmental, greatly reducing the quality and sense of humanity, so that sculpture materials in reality should be used carefully. They carry the aesthetic value which is easy to be infringed. Therefore, to give energy to a material, we need to discover and study its properties and use its imagery language appropriately. A good sculpture is full of light, whether strong or weak, as if it has a tension and spirit, as the Chinese-American architect Pei Luming once said, “My architecture is designed with the participation of light”. As the light source changes over time, the visual aesthetic effect also varies, so the sculpture is a poem with rhythm under the light, which can be described as poetry, containing poetry. This change in the aesthetic effect of light enriches the specific characteristics and aesthetic interest of sculptural imagery.

As the contemporary Chinese cultural and artistic context becomes more and more inclusive and the whole sculpture ecosystem becomes more open, in the current contemporary sculpture creation and teaching practice in China, through the

systematization of sculpture creation and teaching system in a longer period of practical research and artistic exploration, we have absorbed the traditional sculpture realistic and reproduction creation expression and sculpture aesthetic consciousness cultivation methods, while also adhering to the ancient Chinese sculpture art charm and vivid modern imagery aesthetic. This is an emotional communication between the author and the object of his work, and this spiritual communication can actually transcend the life itself and reshape the form of "imagery" as an expression of thought. The viewer can appreciate his sculpture *The Unity of Heaven and Man - Laozi* (Figure 1) from the composition of the sculpture as a whole, the modelling technique is mainly the use of concise and clear lines to shape the space inside the sculpture, engraved with a large number of Laozi's quotations and full of Taoist Zen meaning, this artistic creation reflects Laozi's profound cultural mind with the use of techniques and the expression of imagery, and the inner cultural and spiritual core of Laozi's figure. The artwork is a rich expression of Laozi's inner cultural and spiritual core.



Figure 1. Wu Weishan, *The Unity of Heaven and Man - Laozi*.

The work "China Laozi" by Professor Chen Yungang, former head of the sculpture department of the Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts, is also a work that incorporates his own in-depth consideration and understanding of the cultural connotations of the ancient Taoist classics, combining the design of the figure with the author's own theories and re-understanding of his traditional thought [9]. The work also cleverly employs the conceptual approach of using line work in the sculpture to reveal the figure of an old man living in a deep mountain valley, seated and enlightened. The water ripples that shape the figures' trappings reflect a traditional imaginative thinking that harmonises the saintly figures from the irregularities of complexity and fragmentation, and incorporates this imaginative thinking effectively into the contemporary context.



Figure 2. Chen Yungang, *China Laozi*.



Figure 3. Chen Yungang, *The Eastward Journey of the Great River*.

Another work was also inspired by the use of lines in calligraphy to create “The Eastward Journey of the Great River” (Figure 3), which won the Grand Prix at the exhibition. The sculpture’s lines are consistent throughout, interspersed in an orderly manner, like a static landscape, with the figures sitting at ease as if they were orchids in an empty valley.



Figure 4. Rodin’s Dancers series

The Dancers series (Figure 4) by the French sculptor Rodin challenged a younger generation of sculptors with a completely free form and a more exaggerated twisting of the human body in order to reproduce unrestrained dynamics. These portraits were not created out of the blue, but were the culmination of all Rodin’s exercises and “improvisations” over a long period of time, based on an almost imagery and immediate impression of his life and state of mind at the time [10]. The small size of the figures suggests that they could have been made in the small palm of a sculptor’s hand, with the freedom of positioning and the structural control of soft materials that the process allows, all of which are “image”. In recent years, young and middle-aged sculptors in China have been creating works to pass on the spirit of the Chinese nation as the core of their culture, injecting their own visual expressions and language forms into their creations. Therefore, the “image” of the sculpture is an expression of the spirit, an expression of the world and of the original life. It requires the artist’s grasp of the aesthetic philosophy of the nation and the integration of his or her own aesthetic experience and long hours of artistic creation. The concept of “image” and “spirit” are used to express the work and the cultural understanding of the artist, so that the artistic language of sculpture has been sublimated and given a philosophical and metaphysical unity, as a result of the national and conceptual breakthrough in the creation of sculpture.



Figure 5. Li Geng, Diffraction, 2014 Shanghai Oil Painting and Sculpture Institute Art Museum.

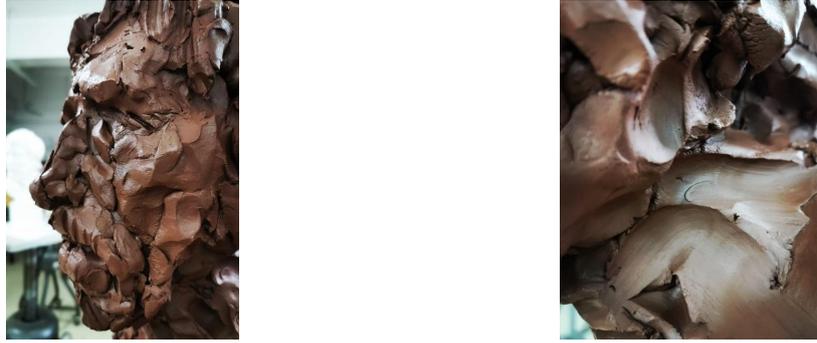


Figure 6. *Li Geng's Imagery Sculpture - Seneca 2022 Teaching demonstration.*

After years of sculptural practice and the study of Chinese and foreign sculpture history, I have also experienced a long period of creation starting with Western figurative sculptures, followed by exposure to metal forging, ceramics, conceptual expressions of mixed materials and so on. I have been able to discuss and explore the sculptural techniques with many of my predecessors, and I was fortunate to have Mr. Yang Dongbai, who returned to Japan to teach at the East University of Arts in Shanghai, to give me a deeper understanding of the imagery and expressive language of sculpture, and then I studied the history of Chinese and foreign sculpture and contemporary Soviet and French art at the Department of Sculpture and the Humanities Institute of the Central Academy of Fine Arts respectively, and under the influence of this artistic atmosphere, I have gradually built up my solid and better ability to shape and express myself and have a new way of thinking about the development of art in the new era. The work is inspired by the “cicada shedding” and is made of gelcoat mixed with mineral colors. The clay sculptures are created with a sense of rhythm, and the clay is created in the same way as the ink and brush, giving it a strong poetic quality. This work is an expression of the realm of life (reincarnation), free from dependence on structure, simplifying and summarizing the object with the intention of moulding it, vivid and symbolic, each moulded mark has been transformed into a brush to 'write' it, using the clay as a brush, moving like the wind, similar to the “chap” method proposed by Mi Fu and Mi Youren. This “sculptural brushwork” is the most obvious basis for drawing on Chinese painting and calligraphy. Another example of this is the half-hour sketching and sculpting of Seneca (Figure 6), which demonstrates the interchangeability between painting and sculpture, i.e. the aesthetic pursuit of writing and imagery in the spirit of Chinese painting and calligraphy. In the shaping of shapes and tapping, the structure of the painting is mostly in the form of squares and circles. The Chinese literati's use of Qi in their paintings is based on the idea that the Qi is gathered in the public region, and that the Qi in this case is “rigid” in nature. The combination of the two embodies the traditional Chinese philosophy of rigidity and flexibility. The use of the knife as a brush and the traces of relaxation in the creation of the brush show the richness of the lines of life, and the form of expression reveals a thick and ancient style of art that is highly poetic.

3. Conclusions

The imagery thinking of Chinese sculpture itself is a unique spiritual connotation of nationalism that runs through the aesthetic development of Chinese sculpture, and this national spiritual connotation has also given contemporary sculptors a greater ability to pursue artistic pursuits and intuition, connotation, and meaningful expression,

giving people another sense of artistic reverie and poetic beauty. Imagery thinking has developed along with the artistic and aesthetic trends of the Chinese era, and is the most accurate contemporary ontology that reflects the essence of the spirit of contemporary Chinese art. The successful creation of imagery sculpture is not an easy task as a professional sculptor, but often requires a combination of long-term theoretical and practical research, literary literacy and self-reflection and innovative development. We must persist in inheriting the tradition and carry it forward to create more classical works to tell the Chinese story.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

References

- [1] Li X. Transcendental Writing and Contemporary Sentiment - A Treatise on Chinese Writing Sculpture. *Ethnic Art Research*, 2016, 2, 228-233.
- [2] Wu, W.S. The poetry of sculpture. Nanjing. *Nanjing University Press*, 2007, 11, 105-111.
- [3] Liang, S.C History of Chinese sculpture. Tianjin. Baihua Wenyi Publishing House. 2003; pp. 55-62.
- [4] Shi, M... The use of object and pictorial in Chinese realistic sculpture. *Drama House*, 2017, 9, 182-183.
- [5] Lou, Y.L. Wang Bi's Collected Works. Beijing. *China Book Bureau*, 2009, 2, 360.
- [6] Pan, Y.B. The use of imagery in Chinese painting in sculpture. *Northeast Normal University*, 2011, 2, 6.
- [7] Zhang, J. Imagery in Sculpture. *Journal of Fine Arts*, 2011, 7, 23-25.
- [8] Yang, X.W. Imagery: the "soul" of sculpture. *Fine Art Observation*, 2006, 3, 45.
- [9] Ma, Q.Z. Sculpture Space Public Art. *Shanghai Xue Lin Publishing House*, 2019, 2, 267-269.
- [10][US]William. Tucker. The language of sculpture. China Ethnic Photography Art Press. 2016; pp. 30-33.



© 2022 by the author(s); licensee International Technology and Science Publications (ITS), this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)