

Transmutation of the “Qi Yun (Rhythm)” Category

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Abstract:

“Qi Yun (rhythm)” is not only an momentous concept in traditional Chinese painting, but also a unique aesthetic topic. Based on the aesthetic definition and research in the context of the integration of “Qi Yun Sheng Dong (lively spirit and charm or vivid Qi Yun)” and “Rhythm” since modern times, this paper traces back to the historical development and aesthetic extension of the category of “Qi Yun (rhythm)”, compares the transition between “rhythm” and “Qi Yun Sheng Dong (lively spirit and charm or vivid Qi Yun)”, and explores the contemporary understanding of “Qi Yun (rhythm)” in the context of Chinese aesthetics.

Keywords:

Qi Yun (Rhythm), Aesthetics, Zong Baihua, Rhythm, Transmutation

1. The Category and Direct Meaning of “Qi Yun (Rhythm)”

1.1. The origin of the category of “Qi Yun (rhythm)”

“Qi Yun (rhythm)” is considered to be an momentous expression rule of Chinese painting, and is also an important concept with characteristics in Chinese aesthetics. As an abstract concept that is difficult to express in concrete language, “Qi Yun (rhythm)” can only be conveyed through the direct expression of arts, so that it can become a concrete and perceptible form - that is, the charm of “Shen Lai Zhi Bi (miraculous painting)” can be understood through the painting itself. The “theory of Qi Yun (rhythm)” emphasizes the spiritual factors of painting, requiring that paintings must have vitality, unique and full of passion. Depending on the texturing of brush strokes, the painting builds a unique kingdom of intentions, which makes the viewer think deeply and can’t help but produce a strong sense of power. It is this theory that has laid the aesthetic foundation of Chinese painting.

The essence of “Qi” is vivid and contagious, focusing on the atmosphere and momentum that can not be seen or touched. That is, the emotional performance of the picture presents a harmonious and unified atmosphere, and the works and the images depicted in the works have a vivid bearing and charm, which is full of vitality. Thus, it can achieve some unique appeal and make the painting have a high degree of artistic expression. For example, Jing Hao wrote in his “Record of Brush Strokes”: “For the

image of mountains and river, ‘Qi’ and ‘Shi’ have mutual influence.” Here, “Qi Shi” means that all parts of the picture are connected with “Qi” and integrated. In addition to the majestic “Qi”, (Figure 1) not many brushstrokes and fresh pictures also generate their own “Qi” accordingly: “Gao Ling Shuang Qi Cheng, Luo Ri Heng Yan Leng. (Fresh air makes people feel refreshed, and the diffuse smoke under the setting sun brings a chill to people)” [1] “Qi” is not superior to inferior, and the “Shuang Qi” here is also a common lonely mood in traditional painting. (Figure 2)



Figure 1. “The Lu Mountain” by Jing Hao of the Wudai Dynasties period, ink painting on silk scroll, 185.8×106.8cm, collected in the Taipei Palace Museum.

The “Yun” can be understood as the manifestation of the intrinsic vitality of the aesthetic object in a form of rhythmic beauty. Therefore, in drawing, the “Brush Strokes (Bi Fa Ji)”, typically considered a painting technique, in traditional Chinese arts, is also endowed with the significance of “Noumenon”. “Casual strokes, not seeking resemblance, merely for self-entertainment” [2] emphasizes the portrayal of a realm and rhythm with each stroke, rather than aiming for similarity in shapes. The brushstrokes themselves are a form of self-expression, a kind of “Yun”. Therefore, another layer of meaning of “Qi Yun (rhythm)” refers to the sense of rhythm and movement in the artistic expression, which is an essential extension from the “Shen Yun (spiritual rhythm)” of humans to the “Qi Yun (rhythm)” of artistic forms.



Figure 2. Partial of “Sparse Forests and Distant Peaks” by Ni Zan of the Yuan Dynasty, ink painting on paper, 72.9×37.5cm, collected in the Taipei Palace Museum.

The concept of “Qi Yun (rhythm)” in Chinese aesthetics originated from the emphasis on “Q” in philosophy and the attention to “Yun” in music during the Han Dynasty. It took root during the Wei and Jin dynasties, which emphasized the roles of

“Qi” and “Yun” in the fields of arts and aesthetics. It matured during the Northern and Southern Dynasties, when various art forms advocated for the beauty of vividly expressing the “Qi Yun (rhythm)” of things. The earliest proponent of this theory was the Southern Dynasty painter Xie He. Xie He was a theorist during about the Southern Qi Dynasty and also a painter. However, his major contributions were still in the realm of painting theory. Xie He’s “Appraisal and Documentation of Ancient Paintings (Gu Hua Pin Lu)” is the ancient first theoretical article evaluating painting works and the authors.

In the “Appraisal and Documentation of Ancient Paintings (Gu Hua Pin Lu)”, “Qi Yun (rhythm)” is expressed as “Qi Yun Sheng Dong (lively spirit and charm or vivid Qi Yun)” [3]. The “Six Principles” in the “Appraisal and Documentation of Ancient Paintings (Gu Hua Pin Lu)” were proposed based on the summary of the painting creation experience and theoretical foundation of predecessors and contemporaries. Xie He systematized the previously scattered and vague thoughts, clearly defining them as criteria for criticism. Due to the inclusiveness and generality of these criteria, they later became universal guiding rules for all genres of painting and also became the standard for evaluating Chinese painting as a whole. “Qi Yun Sheng Dong (lively spirit and charm or vivid Qi Yun)” emphasizes the vivid reflection of the spiritual state and character of the subject as the highest criterion of artistic expression [4], mainly referring to the portrayal of the spiritual appearance of the object at that time, making the work have vivid emotional appeal.

1.2. The Aesthetic Extension of the “Theory of Qi Yun (rhythm)”

1.2.1. Historical investigation and debate and Aesthetic Evolution of “Qi Yun (rhythm)”

The philosophical foundation of “qi” originated from pre-Qin period philosophy. The “Guan Zi” states: “The way of world lies in the sun, and the way of man lies in Qi. Therefore, it is said that there is life with Qi, and death without Qi. Life relies on its Qi.” The concept was nurtured during the Han Dynasty, as thinkers of Han Dynasty further developed the philosophy of Yuan Qi Zi Ran (the natural philosophy of original Qi) based on pre-Qin Qi theories. Philosophy attached great importance to the concept of “Qi” [5], affirming that Yuan Qi is the origin of all things and life itself, thus, the aesthetic category of “Qi Yun (rhythm)” initially emerged from philosophical theories. By the Wei and Jin period, the philosophical concept of “Qi” gradually evolved into the aesthetic realm of “Qi”. At this time, “Qi” mostly referred to the temperament and personality of artists, as well as the infectiousness and vitality internalized in artistic works.

In the pre-Qin period, there was no word “Yun”. The term “Yun” first appeared in the Han Dynasty [6], where people emphasized “rhythm” in music. The emergence of the concept of “Yun” is directly related to the artistic activities in the Han Dynasty that valued musical rhythm. By the Wei and Jin periods, “Yun” had widely appeared as an aesthetic category in the artistic and aesthetic fields of that time. At the same time, during the Wei and Jin periods, “Yun” as an aesthetic category was not only applied in the field of music [7], but also in the field of character appreciation. The rhythm of music began to blend with the character of individuals. In “Shi Shuo Xin Yu, Literature Chapter”, it is said, “Pei Xia engaged in debate as his profession. He was skilled in expounding on principles, his language was clear and refreshing, and he remained calm and composed, much like the harmonious melodies of a zither.

Whether one understood the content of his speech or not, those who heard his words couldn't help but admire him."

In the character appreciation of the Wei and Jin periods, there gradually emerged an aesthetic phenomenon where "Qi" and "Yun" were integrated to evaluate characters. For example, Geng Liang of the Eastern Jin Dynasty praised Zhai Zhengjun as follows: "The gentleman Zhai of Nanyang in Jin Dynasty, inheriting the elegant Qi from the heavens, containing unique vitality." In the early Northern and Southern Dynasties, similar aesthetic phenomena can also be observed. For instance, Zhang Chang of the Liu Song Dynasty eulogized Master Ruoye Shan with the words: "He possessed a unique Qi since youth; though young, he was already exceptional. His spirit was extraordinary, his aspirations lofty." This aesthetic phenomenon, where "Qi" and "Yun" are integrated to appreciate characters, refers to the rhythmic beauty presented by the vigorous and spirited life activities of characters. Subsequently, the category of "Qi Yun (rhythm)" extended from the domain of character appreciation to various artistic disciplines. Thus, it laid the groundwork for the theory of "Qi Yun (rhythm)" in the Six Dynasties' art criticism.

Although the concept of "Yi Qi Lun Wen (judging literature by its Qi)" (Figure 3) existed prior to Xie He, as seen in the "Dian Lun Lun Wen (Classified Treatise on Literature)", where "Yi Qi Lun Wen (judging literature by its Qi)" (8) is mentioned, and "Qi Yun (rhythm)" was initially proposed as the foremost principle in art criticism, the term "Qi Yun (rhythm)" was borrowed from the "Dian Lun Lun Wen (Classified Treatise on Literature)". In the "Nan Qi Tian Wen Zhuan Book of Southern Qi: Biography of Literature", it is stated, "Literature serves as the embodiment of temperament, the expression of divine laws, containing profound thoughts and sentiments; when the words flow onto the paper, the qi and rhythm are naturally achieved." Xie He applied the concept of "Qi Yun (rhythm)" to both painting and painters. The "Qi" mentioned by Xie He still adheres to the tradition of judging people by their Qi. Specifically, in Xie He's "Record of Ancient Paintings", the "intention" of "Qi" is articulated in eight aspects:

The first point is "Qi Yun (rhythm), vividness"; (preface); the second point is "exhibiting remarkable spirit or ambition (Qi) (comment on Wei Xie); the third point is "bearing the aura of style and atmosphere" (comment on Zhang Mo and Xun Xu); the fourth point is [4] "spiritual charm and vigor" (comment on Gu Junzhi); the fifth point is "the harmonious and refreshing day" (comment on Gu Junzhi); the sixth point is "although lacking in strength" (comment on Xia Zhan); the seventh point is "exhibiting remarkable charisma or presence (Qi) (comment on Emperor Ming of Jin); the eighth point is "lacking in vitality" (comment on Ding Guang). [9]



Figure 3. In the Wei-Jin period, Cao Pi, *Dian Lun Lun Wen (Classified Treatise on Literature)*.

In this context, only the “Qi” in “the harmonious and refreshing day” (comment on Gu Junzhi) refers to the “Qi” of the sky, namely the atmospheric Qi. The other seven types of “Qi” all refer to the “Qi” of “Qi Yun (rhythm)” in the context of discussing painting. Here, Xie He uses “Qi” to critique paintings, just as one critiques literature, books, and poetry based on “Qi”. Therefore, the Qi of poetry, books, paintings, and literature can all be summarized and evaluated in the same way, forming a virtual “Qi” that rises to a certain aesthetic height, becoming an aesthetic concept that can judge the merits of literary and artistic works. “Qi” can be seen as the elemental Qi of life, reflecting and presenting the innermost feelings of individuals. Both literary and artistic creations such as writings, paintings, books, and poetry require this kind of “Qi”. In the mentioned articles, literary criticism, and paintings, “Qi Yun (rhythm)” refers to the means of artistic creation, such as the brushwork and coloring techniques in painting, the use of ink in different tones, and the rhythmic vitality of objects reflected in the rhetorical devices and sentence structure of poetry and literature.

Through this process, the subjective “self” is projected onto the objective “object”, and then, through the “object”, the self-expression is achieved. The artwork can thus reflect the personal nature of the creator, which is their artistic realm. Therefore, it becomes inevitable to critique poetry, literature, books, and paintings based on “Qi”. The essence of “Qi” originates from the aesthetic creation of humans, hence it possesses “Sheng (vitality)” and “Dong (movement)”. Qi is inherently vivid, and on this foundation of vividness, “Qi” takes on an additional layer of meaning as “vitality”, which aligns with the concept of “Qi Yun Sheng Dong (lively spirit and charm or vivid Qi Yun)” mentioned in the art criticism. In Xie He’s works, “Qi Yun (rhythm)” precisely integrates the talent of the artist with the charm and momentum seen in the artwork. “Yun” also encompasses the spiritual realm of the creator and the rhythmic cadence of the artwork. From this perspective, “Yun” and “Qi” are intertwined and inseparable. “Qi Yun (rhythm)” and the artist themselves are closely linked.

In his commentary on Xie He’s works in the “Continuation of Appraisal and Documentation of Ancient Paintings (Xu Hua Ping)” Chen Yaozui remarked, “As for the ethereal charm of Qi Yun, it embodies an inexhaustible vitality.” Here, the “Qi” in “Qi Yun (rhythm)” is understood as “vitality”, representing a vibrant and dynamic balance, as “all things carry Yin yet embrace Yang, blending Qi to create harmony”, symbolizing a vivid and dynamic equilibrium. However, with the evolution of the concept, the term “Qi Yun (rhythm)” later came to be represented more by “Yun”, especially after the emergence of ink techniques, focusing more on the aspect of “rhythm”.

This evolution is also reflected in landscape painting, where the “Qi” in “Qi Yun (rhythm)” gradually gives way to “Qi Shi”. In the context of traditional Chinese painting, the generation or transformation of all things relies entirely on “Qi”. “Qi Yun (rhythm)” has become an enigmatic concept that cannot be attained through skill alone, representing an experiential and abstract aesthetic. [10] Xie He’s initiation of “Qi Yun (rhythm)” became a benchmark for judging the value of artworks after the the period of Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, becoming one of the aesthetic standards in traditional art. “Qi Yun (rhythm)” itself thus elevated into a realm of life, while art became a means of aesthetic pathway to realizing life and constructing the self.

1.2.2. The extension and aesthetic generalization of “Qi Yun (rhythm)”

Although Xie He proposed the concept of “Qi Yun (rhythm)”, we cannot ignore the context of the times. During that period, the focus was primarily on how artworks portrayed the demeanor and charm of the object, emphasizing the lifelike representation of objects. Overall, the discourse on painting still emphasized “depicting form” rather than “depicting spirit”. Since the Tang Dynasty, with the rise of landscape painting, discussions on painting often centered on “brushwork (Bi)” for “Qi” and “ink (Mo)” for “Yun”, as exemplified by sayings such as “painting uses concentrated ink to give life to spirit resonance.” Some theories even unified them as “Qi Yun (rhythm)” seen from “brush work and ink (Bi Mo)”. [11]

Whether conflating “Qi Yun (rhythm)” with “brushwork and ink (Bi Mo)” considering both ink and brush as “Yun”, or thoroughly regarding “Qi Yun (rhythm)” as the artist's way of expressing oneself, evolving into the spiritual realm as described earlier, which suggests that lower-grade “Qi Yun (rhythm)” originates from “brush work and ink (Bi Mo)”, while higher-grade arises from the heart, naturally cultivated, [12] none of these interpretations should overlook the original value of “Qi Yun (rhythm)” within its original context. When retracing the origin of “Qi Yun (rhythm)”, we should realize that this is no longer Xie He's original intent but rather an artistic value that has been continuously developed and extended by later generations. These extensions and developments are equally important as the proposition of “Qi Yun (rhythm)” itself.

In the traditional aesthetics of Chinese painting, the concept of “Qi Yun (rhythm)” as proposed by Xie He has not yet been established as a clearly defined system. As a painter of the Southern Dynasties in the period of obscurity and initiation, Xie He, constrained by the limitations of his time, was unable to fully articulate his theoretical framework. What we perceive today regarding the understanding of “Qi Yun (rhythm)” and the general artistic landscape is the result of subsequent artists and theorists innovating and evolving the specific application of “Qi Yun (rhythm)” based on their own experiences and understanding. Placed within the context of the trends and ideologies of his time, even though Xie He theoretically proposed “Qi Yun (rhythm)” as a criterion and rule for artistic creation, his paintings are still categorized by later scholars as belonging to the “Gongti Hua (palace-style painting)” often associated with literati painters who emphasized “Qi Yun (rhythm)” [13].



Figure 4. Tang Dynasty, Wu Daozi “Tianwang Sengzi Tu”, ink on paper, 35.5×338.1cm, housed in the Osaka City Museum of Fine Arts in Japan.

The brushwork of “bone method” in Xie He's Six Principles of Chinese painting is closely related to the “Qi” of “Qi Yun (rhythm)”. The “bone method” of brushwork refers to the main structure of a painting delineated by lines, where the smoothness of these lines constitutes the most basic condition for achieving “likeness”. Xie He believed that “only by capturing the spirit can the bone method be preserved. If confined to the representation of objects, the essence will not be seen.” On the other

hand, the movement forms of lines themselves, such as flexibility, breaks, lengths, and shortness, bring a sense of rhythm and strength to the viewers, creating a sense of force. Wu Daozi is a representative figure in this regard. (Figure 4)

However, as the term “Qi Yun (rhythm)” evolved with literati painting, it gradually encompassed more aspects of self-expression by creators, naturally becoming somewhat confused with the character evaluation of the Wei and Jin dynasties. It also added a series of concepts such as atmosphere, clarity, turbidity, emptiness, and reality, thus adding a tendency towards mystification. [14] “Brushwork is sufficient, light wash to give rise to its charm”, “Qi Yun (rhythm) is hidden in brush and ink, where both brush and ink become Qi Yun (rhythm)”, “ink is broken to create charm(Yun),” “it should be dense rather than light, otherwise the spirit is incomplete. It should be light rather than dense, otherwise the charm is insufficient.” In fact, regarding “charm” as “lightness” is actually an expression of the aesthetic tendency of clarity, remoteness, and tranquility in traditional aesthetics. Therefore, a series of conclusions were drawn, among which the most significant one is: “Charm seen from ink is easy, charm seen from brush is difficult, and unintentional charm is even more difficult.” [11,12] It is the realm of ‘technique advancing towards Dao’ and the state of “xin zhai” and “zuo wang” produced by it. “Qi Yun (rhythm)” becomes the highest level of subjective projection onto the objective, merging into one, where the subject and object become unified, vivid and natural, displaying the highest level of charm and atmosphere, and also an extremely abstract standard. It becomes one of the ultimate goals that painting, the entire art of modeling, and even artistic creators aim to achieve. This characteristic is most perfectly embodied in Yuan Dynasty painting, transforming the quality of painting since the Tang and Song dynasties into a realm of ethereal transcendence and vibrant vitality. The expression of brush and ink also reaches the state of “By employing brush and ink, the momentum, emotions, or artistic conception within the artwork are unified and transformed”, emphasizing the ability to perceive everything amidst the ethereal and elusive, transcending forms, and yet encompassing everything within an empty void.

In summary, “Qi” initially emerged as a philosophical concept rooted in the Han Dynasty's theory of elemental Qi. “Yun”, on the other hand, carries a stronger imprint of musical rhythm theory and metaphysical aesthetics from the Wei and Jin dynasties. With a political inclination towards the Han Dynasty and a cultural continuation of the Wei and Jin periods, the term “Qi Yun (rhythm)” became a vocabulary to describe painting. The original meaning of “Qi Yun Sheng Dong (lively spirit and charm or vivid Qi Yun)” comes from the painting technique in Chinese art known as “brushwork”. In the Six Principles, “Qi Yun Sheng Dong (lively spirit and charm or vivid Qi Yun)” emphasizes the dynamic flow of lines, the richness and accuracy of colors, and the lively imagery of forms, presenting the generation of “Qi Yun (rhythm)” on the canvas. The discussion of “Qi” through brushwork and “Yun” through ink emerged in later periods of literati painting, essentially forming what we now recognize as the “theory of Qi Yun (rhythm)” Although this type of analysis seems to be focused on technical aspects, the meaning and vocabulary of “Qi Yun (rhythm)” differ significantly from when it was first proposed and applied to painting. [15] The “theory of Qi Yun (rhythm)” in Ming and Qing Dynasty painting theories integrates the harmony of heaven, earth, and nature with the artist's subjective spirit. The primacy lies in the representation of objects and the artist's thoughts, where technique serves as a means to convey brushwork and ink colors. The ultimate goal is to create a freely expressive artistic realm where the artist's individuality shines:

harmonious gradations, the interplay of emptiness and solidity, and the synthesis of diverse elements.

2. The Modern Attention and Aesthetic Exploration of “Qi Yun (Rhythm)”

“Qi Yun (rhythm)” has become an important topic in modern aesthetics and artistic critique during the first half of the 20th century. Among various interpretations, Zong Baihua successfully transformed “Qi Yun (rhythm)” into a concept within modern aesthetics and art criticism. As early as the beginning of the 20th century, Western scholars began to translate the important concept of “Qi Yun (rhythm)” in Chinese painting in various ways, eventually settling on “rhythm” as the translation for “Qi Yun (rhythm)”, which gradually became popular. Although, literally speaking, “rhythm” may not be an accurate translation for “Qi Yun”, other translations such as “resonance” or “consonance” might be closer to the original meaning of “Qi Yun (rhythm)”. However, in practice, “rhythm” has become the commonly accepted translation for “Qi Yun (rhythm)”. According to Martin Powers’ research, one significant reason [16] for this situation is the influence of Chinese calligraphy and painting on the Western modern aesthetic valuation of rhythmic lines.

Firstly, Western modern painting’s emphasis on the aesthetic value of “rhythm” has been influenced by Chinese calligraphy and painting.

Secondly, as Westerners became accustomed to the aesthetic tastes of modern painting, they began to forget its Chinese origins, regarding “rhythm” as an inherent aesthetic pursuit in Western painting.

Thirdly, the reason why Western aestheticians use “rhythm” to translate “Qi Yun (rhythm)” is because the concept of “rhythm” in Western modern painting itself is a result of the influence of Chinese calligraphy.

However, “rhythm” is evidently not equivalent to “Qi Yun (rhythm)”, and in the history of Chinese aesthetics, the concept of “rhythm” has not appeared. [17] Teng Gu acknowledges that “rhythm” is a new concept. Around the same time as Teng Gu’s research, another Chinese aesthetician, Deng Yizhe, also began studying “Qi Yun Sheng Dong (lively spirit and charm or vivid Qi Yun)”. Although Deng Yizhe’s research was also influenced by the prevalent terminology at the time, interpreting “Qi Yun Sheng Dong (lively spirit and charm or vivid Qi Yun)” as “rhythm”, unlike Teng Gu, who indiscriminately equates “Qi Yun Sheng Dong (lively spirit and charm or vivid Qi Yun)” with “rhythm”, Deng Yizhe advocates distinguishing “Qi Yun (rhythm)” from “vividness”. Despite both researching “Qi Yun Sheng Dong (lively spirit and charm or vivid Qi Yun)”, Teng Gu emphasizes vividness and “rhythm” as modern, while Deng Yizhe emphasizes “Qi Yun (rhythm)”, “Vaporousness (Ying Yun)”, and “China”. Of course, this does not mean that their research is completely opposite; their differences lie only in their emphasis.

In the early 1930s, Zong Baihua began to pay attention to and study “Qi Yun (rhythm)”. Zong Baihua’s research on “Qi Yun (rhythm)” benefited from comparison with Western aesthetics and art, and he did not escape the influence of the prevalent terminology of the time. For example, he believed that the theme of Chinese painting, “Qi Yun Sheng Dong (lively spirit and charm or vivid Qi Yun)”, is equivalent to “the rhythm of life” or “a rhythmic life”. However, upon closer examination of Zong Baihua’s discourse, it will be noticed that he differs from Teng Gu. This difference is

related to Zong Baihua's change in aesthetic thinking. [18] Due to the comparison with Western culture, Zong Baihua gained a clearer and deeper understanding of Chinese culture. Zong Baihua's understanding of the value of Chinese culture stems from his understanding of Western culture. Without Western culture as a reference, perhaps the understanding of China would not be as clear and profound. [19]

Zong Baihua believes that the expression of “Qi Yun Sheng Dong (lively spirit and charm or vivid Qi Yun)”, in Chinese painting is not achieved through “rhythm”, but through “Emptiness (Kong): The vibrant Qi envelops all things, yet it is intangible and ethereal; hence, in painting, it manifests as emptiness and fluidity. Chinese painting emphasizes the importance of empty spaces. These empty spaces are not true vacuums, but rather locations where spiritual energies flow and life moves. Moreover, emptiness leads to simplicity, and simplicity leads to refinement, allowing for the overflowing of ideas and the transcending of appearances.” Corresponding to “emptiness (Kong)” are “stillness” and “simplicity”. “Emptiness (Kong)”, stillness (Jing)”, and “simplicity (Jian)” contrast with “existence (You)”, “movement (Dong)”, and “complexity (Fan)”. The former expresses the simplification and abstraction of the material world by the pure spirit or mind. Through the infusion, simplification, and abstraction of the mind, material blocks and substantiality dissolve into the flow of emptiness and spiritual energy. Ultimately, the universe is fundamentally composed of this flowing spiritual energy.

In Zong Baihua's view, this is a unique cosmological concept among the Chinese. The distinct pursuits of Chinese and Western painting are not rooted in differences in tools, but fundamentally stem from differences in cosmological views. Thus, when understanding “Qi Yun Sheng Dong (lively spirit and charm or vivid Qi Yun)”, Zong Baihua does not only consider surface forms of painting but also connects it with China's unique cosmological perspective. Even though there is “movement (Dong)” within “Qi Yun Sheng Dong (lively spirit and charm or vivid Qi Yun)”, it is not the “rhythm” of lines in Western painting but rather the flow of spiritual energy within emptiness.

3. Observing and Contemplating the Category of “Qi Yun”

Introducing the category of “Qi Yun (rhythm)” into modern art aesthetics not only contributes to the integration of artistic concepts but also helps achieve a unity between historical study and logical analysis in the study of artistic forms. Attention should also be paid to the phenomenon of the generalization of the definition of “Qi Yun”. In conjunction with Mr. Zhang Xikun's article “Debating the Category of ‘Qi Yun’” (published in “Chinese Social Sciences” in 2000, (02), pp. 154-166), a brief summary of the definition of “Qi Yun (rhythm)” can be made, suggesting that there are three phenomena worthy of observation and contemplation.

3.1. Phenomenon One: Interpreting the “Yun” of Qi Yun with Spiritual “Feng Yun”

Originally, “Yun” referred to the rhythmic movement and melody of sound. By the time of the Jin Dynasty, “Yun” had evolved to describe the elegance and spirit of characters. The demeanor and disposition exhibited by individuals in their speech, behavior, and appearance were often equated with “Yun”. However, simultaneously, the musical connotation of “Yun” persisted. [20] Until the Six Dynasties period, the dual meanings of “Yun” coexisted, referring either to the musical rhythm or to the

spiritual elegance. In practical research, some scholars argue that besides elegance, “Yun” has no other connotation. They emphasize that the “Yun” in vivid Qi Yun does not refer to musical rhythm or melody and should not be confused with it, emphasizing the importance of distinguishing “Yun” from musical rhythm.

3.2. Phenomenon Two: Interpreting the “Qi” of “Qi Yun (rhythm)” with “Wen Qi”

In the understanding of the category of “Qi Yun (rhythm)”, it is generally believed that “Qi Yun (rhythm)” originates from “Yuan Qi (vital energy)”. However, in practical application, none can overlook Cao Pi’s assertion that “Wen is based on Qi”, replacing “Yuan Qi (vital energy)” with “Wen Qi”, and explaining the “Qi” of Qi Yun with the temperament, personality, talent, and physiological and psychological factors of the artist. There exists a tendency in the research process to oversimplify the interpretation of “Qi Yun (rhythm)”, replacing “Yuan Qi” with “Wen Qi”. The negligence lies in the fact that “Wen Qi” derives from “Yuan Qi(vital energy)”. Therefore, interpreters often overlook the differences between “Wen Qi” and “Yuan Qi (vital energy)”, treating “Wen Qi” as a footnote to the “Qi” of Qi Yun. Interpreting the “Qi” of Qi Yun with the temperament and personality of “Wen Qi” forgets that “Qi” is the natural expression of the artist’s inner being and mistakenly assumes that the primary purpose of creation is to express self-awareness. “Qi” constitutes “Wen Qi” while “Yun” represents elegance and spirit. Thus, “Qi Yun (rhythm)” is mistakenly interpreted as “Chuan Shen (expressing vividness)”, explaining the “Qi” of Qi Yun with the artistic subject’s temperament and nature. However, “Qi” is the vital energy of movement, not limited to the Wen Qi of the creative subject.

3.3. Phenomenon Three: The Positioning of the Philosophical Foundation of “Qi Yun (rhythm)”

The philosophical foundation of “Qi Yun (rhythm)” does not lie in the “Xuan”. The Wei and Jin metaphysics seldom discussed “Qi”, and while the Wei and Jin metaphysical tradition emphasized “Yun”, there is no evidence of merging “Qi” and “Yun” into a single concept. After the Qi and Liang dynasties, [21] the cultural dominance of the aristocratic class gradually waned due to profound social changes, and metaphysics had declined. Consequently, there emerged new changes in literary and artistic theory, and the theory of literary and artistic ontology also emerged. In such an environment, Xie He’s “Hua Lun” was born. Even with the confrontation between “emphasis on spirit” and “emphasis on form”, which caused certain theoretical entanglements, it still cannot conceal the lofty aesthetic thoughts and the profound influence of the “Six Principles” on later generations.

4. Conclusions

As a unique topic within the context of Chinese aesthetics, the transformation of the “Qi Yun (rhythm)” category should correspond to historical aesthetic positioning and extension. Whether it is the confrontation between form and spirit or the contrast between “Qi Yun Sheng Dong (lively spirit and charm or vivid Qi Yun)” and “rhythm” in modern times, the introduction of “Qi Yun (rhythm)” into the aesthetic category of artistic forms necessitates that its study must adhere to the unity of history and logic.

Conflicts of Interest

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

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References

- [1] Ming Dynasty, Wen Jia's self-titled "Imitating Ni Yuanzhen's Landscape" reads as follows: "In a lofty and clear atmosphere, as the setting sun lies across the cold mist horizontally, the lonely grassy pavilion stands in solitude, with scattered clouds casting small shadows."
- [2] Yuan Dynasty, Ni Zan's "Reply to Zhang Zaozhong's Letter" states: "As for what I call painting, it is merely a carefree scribbling, not seeking resemblance, just for self-entertainment." This means that painting does not seek resemblance but rather seeks to express the inner spirit for self-entertainment.
- [3] "Qi Yun Sheng Dong (lively spirit and charm or vivid Qi Yun)" or "Qi Yun, liveliness" originally was a term used by literati in the Wei and Jin Dynasties, such as "Feng Qi Yun Du" and "Qi Yun Qiu Mai", which referred to the spiritual temperament, sentiment, and charm displayed in the posture and expression of characters. Similar concepts emerged in painting theory, initially used to evaluate the portrayal of figures in paintings, gradually expanding to assess works beyond character paintings and even certain elements of painting forms.
- [4] "Qi Yun (rhythm)" and "Chuan Shen (Spirit Conveyance)" are consistent in explaining the spiritual qualities of character images. However, "Chuan Shen (Spirit Conveyance)" mostly refers to the expression conveyed by the facial features, especially the eyes of characters, from Gu Kaizhi onwards. "Qi Yun (rhythm)" refers more to the temperament conveyed by the overall demeanor and speech of characters, or the externalization of internal emotions.
- [5] Han Dynasty, in the "Huai Nan Zi": "Yin and yang inherit the harmony of heaven and earth, forming myriad diverse bodies, containing Qi to transform things, thus creating similar shapes." It affirms that all things are generated from the combination of the Yin and Yang energies. Han Dynasty's Wang Chong's "Lun Heng": "Heaven and earth combine their energies, and all things are self-generated." "Heaven and earth combine their energies, and human beings are self-generated." "Before a person is born, they are within the primordial Qi; once dead, they return to the primordial Qi. When the primordial qi is depleted, the human Qi is within it."
- [6] Eastern Han Dynasty, Cai Yong's "Qin Fu": "With clear sounds rising, encompassing the five tones. The variation and flow of musical tones depict the beauty and dynamism of music.... Then, as the intricate strings are restrained, elegant rhythms resurface." Wei and Jin Dynasties, Cao Zhi's "Bai He Fu": "Listening to the melodious tones of the refined qin, recalling the faint flow of the six feathers." Western Jin Dynasty, Lu Ji's "Wen Fu": "Sometimes expressing in brief rhythms, confronting poverty while nurturing one's solitary inspiration."

- [7] Eastern Jin Dynasty, Sun Chuo's "Yingzhou Fu Jun Bei": "With a lofty and graceful figure, possessing outstanding talent and elegance, surpassing others in height, towering over them."
- [8] Wei and Jin Dynasties, Cao Pi stated: "In literature, Qi is paramount. The clarity and turbidity of Qi have substance, it cannot be forcefully controlled to achieve clarity."
- [9] Southern Dynasties: Liu Yiqing's "A New Account of the Tales of the World". Zhonghua Book Company, 2009.
- [10] Song Dynasty: Guo Ruoxu's "Records of Visual Observations on Paintings": "The Six Canons are profound principles, immutable throughout eternity. However, in terms of brushwork according to the principles of structure, the following five aspects can be learned. As for the Qi Yun, it must arise from innate understanding... Once a person's character is noble, their Qi Yun cannot help but be elevated; and once their Qi Yun is elevated, liveliness must ensue. This is what is meant by the extraordinary refinement achieved through spirituality."
- [11] Qing Dynasty: Wang Yuanqi's "Random Thoughts by the Rainy Window": "The use of ink and brushwork are interconnected; the Five Ink Methods (dry, black, dense, light, wet) do not hold dual meanings, their essence lies in the vibrancy of Qi Yun. That is the key point."
- [12] Qing Dynasty, Zhang Geng's "Discourse on Painting at Pusan Mountain": To let Qi Yun manifest without intention is the highest. Qi Yun may manifest from the ink, from the brush, from intention, or unintentionally. Manifesting unintentionally is the highest, followed by manifesting from intention, then from the brush, and lastly from the ink. "Ming Dynasty, Dong Qichang's "Essays from the Painting Zen Room": "The six principles for painters. First, Qi Yun Sheng Dong(lively spirit and charm or vivid Qi Yun). Qi Yun cannot be learned; it is known inherently, a gift from heaven." The modern era, Huang Binhong's "Brief Discussion on Painting and Calligraphy": "Qi governs the strength of the brush; Yun comes from the ink and colors. Wherever the Qi reaches, there lies the strength."
- [13] Liang and Chen periods, Yao Zui. In the "Continuation of Appraisal and Documentation of Ancient Paintings (Xu Hua Pin)", it is written: "With meticulous strokes and careful study, the aim is to achieve lifelike resemblance down to the smallest detail, leaving nothing overlooked. Attire and adornment are elaborately fashioned, subject to change with the times, featuring both straight and curved eyebrows, competing with the latest trends. Embracing unique styles and subtle nuances, many aspects originate from Xie He himself. This results in artists throughout the lanes and alleys imitating his style." Yao Zui was intimately familiar with Xie He's artistic style, believing that Xie He's creative practice deliberately pursued a harmonious interplay between form and likeness.
- [14] Ming Dynasty, Li Rihua's "Leisurely Discourses on Painting, Like Bamboo": "Painting must capture the subtle and desolate beauty, entering into the realm where essence and spirit are fully expressed, which is not easily attained. The so-called Qi Yun must be inherently understood; there are many implications within this emptiness and simplicity. As for meticulous precision and exaggerated details, even with great skill and effort, what relevance do they have in the realm of higher artistic expression?"

- [15]Qing Dynasty, Yun Shouping's "Collected Works of Ou Xiangguan": "Ink(Mo) and brush(Bi) can be understood, but celestial secrets cannot be understood; rules can be acquired, but Qi Yun cannot be acquired."
- [16]Qing Dynasty, Zhang Geng's "Discourse on Painting at Pusan Mountain": "What is meant by manifesting unintentionally? It is when one concentrates deeply, allowing their thoughts to flow freely, their gaze to move effortlessly, at first not expecting it to be so, but suddenly it is. ... For the revelation of celestial secrets, only those who are calm can perceive them first."
- [17]Bao Huashi: "The comparison between the 'likeness' and 'freehand' styles of Tang and Song theorists had a direct impact on European modernist theories and played a key role in the construction of modern formalist theories."
- [18]Teng Gu's "Rhythm of Art": "The rhythm of art is a new term popular today. I cite ancient texts to explain. In today's age of scientific enlightenment, some may mock my talk of the profound. However, I must reluctantly cite one or two Western scholars to testify, in order to defend myself."
- [19]Deng Yizhe: "It is particularly noteworthy that liveliness and Qi Yun are not the same. Liveliness can be manifested with tangible forms, whereas Qi Yun cannot; it is intangible. Liveliness attains Qi Yun and then becomes complete; it is particularly Qi Yun that relies on liveliness to fully express its intent. Therefore, it is undoubtedly through liveliness that the intangible and extraordinary Qi Yun is revealed."
- [20]Zong Baihua: "I believe that China's future culture will not succeed simply by importing Western culture. There is greatness and beauty inherent in China's ancient culture, which must not be eradicated. For example, Chinese painting has carved out its own path in the world, and compared to Western painting, its value is not easily determined. It is only after experiencing Western culture that one truly appreciates it."
- [21]From the "Book of Southern Qi · Biography of Lu Cheng": "Yongming usurped power, imitated and replicated, and Wang Xian served as his assistant. Proficient in the classics and rituals, he was highly respected by the court, and his descendants followed his example, delving into Confucian teachings, studying Confucian texts, and eagerly embracing them, thus enriching themselves." From the "Book of Liang · Preface to the Transmission of Confucianism": "In establishing a nation and governing the people, establishing education as the foremost priority, cultivating oneself through learning, and adhering to the classics."
- [22]Wang Senqian's "Exhortation to My Son": "One's natural disposition is the foundation, one's voice shows neither sorrow nor joy; all words should be sincere and genuine, like when guests arrive."
- [23]From the Wei and Jin periods, Ji Kang's "Qin Fu": "Changing tones and adjusting melodies; only then can the unusual performances emerge." From the Qi and Liang periods, Liu Xie's "Wen Xin Diao Long": "Harmony among different tones is called ;He', and correspondence between similar tones is called 'Yun'" referring to the rhythmic patterns and melodies of musical sounds.



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