

Elegant Implication: the Artistic Connotation in Chen Shining's Paintings

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Abstract:

Southern Jiangsu scenery has been an enduring and classic theme pursued by painters throughout Chinese art history. Generations of artists have created numerous timeless works centering on the poetic water town landscape. Focusing on the nearly forty-year oil painting creation practice of Professor Chen Shining from Nanjing University of the Arts, this paper takes his persistent aesthetic pursuit of truth, goodness and beauty in the seasonal changes of southern Jiangsu water towns as the core aesthetic clue. Through an in-depth analysis of his sincere portrayal of plants, landscapes and humanistic scenes in southern Jiangsu water towns, this study interprets the endless poetic vitality of seasonal cycle scenery in southern Jiangsu and the contemporary aesthetic connotation endowed by the times. It systematically summarizes the unique elegant implication, poetic temperament and humanistic value contained in Chen Shining's oil painting art, highlighting his innovative integration of traditional Jiangnan aesthetics and modern oil painting language in contemporary Chinese figurative oil painting creation.

Keywords:

Chen Shining, Southern Jiangsu Landscape, Water Town Scenery, Elegant Implication, Poetic Oil Painting

1. Introduction

Southern Jiangsu landscape, characterized by tender water town charm, misty rain imagery and profound humanistic elegance, has always constituted a core creative theme in traditional Chinese painting art. Painters of different dynasties have depicted distinctive regional features and artistic conceptions of Jiangnan water towns, forming a rich and diverse aesthetic context for Jiangnan landscape painting. In contemporary art creation, a large number of outstanding painters have long focused on the expression of Jiangnan scenery, including Liu Haisu, Su Tianyi and Shen Xingong. As a representative contemporary oil painter and educator in southern China, Chen Shining has constructed a unique poetic aesthetic system for Jiangnan scenery with the unique material language of oil painting. His artistic creation is famous for its delicate and elegant implication. His works not only reflect superb painting techniques and rigorous modeling attainments but also carry profound traditional cultural heritage and unique contemporary aesthetic pursuits, presenting the exclusive literati poetry of contemporary artists in depicting the seasonal landscapes of southern

Jiangsu. This paper conducts a systematic and in-depth discussion on the elegant aesthetic implication embodied in Chen Shining's painting art.

2. The Eternal Aesthetic Theme: Poetic Years in the Misty Rain Corridor of Jiangnan

The core artistic charm of southern Jiangsu scenery can be interpreted from multiple dimensional symbols, including misty drizzle, hazy water vapor, ink-wash-style seasonal natural landscapes, white-walled and black-tiled traditional buildings, stone arch bridges, wooden boats and water alleys, as well as profound traditional humanistic spirits. The integration of water and ink, and the harmonious coexistence between human and nature have always been the essential creative themes for ancient literati and artists. Born and raised in Nanjing, Chen Shining has been deeply nurtured by the unique humanistic implication of Jiangnan region. He received systematic academic education at Nanjing University of the Arts, obtaining his bachelor's and doctoral degrees under the influence of China's classic imagery painting tradition. During his academic career, he was edified by the artistic concepts of senior art educators including Lu Sibai, Su Tianyi, Xie Haiyan and Zhang Qinghua, inheriting and carrying forward the distinctive imagery painting tradition and humanistic temperament of Nanjing University of the Arts.

Rooted in the fertile land of Jiangnan, Chen Shining takes the local plants, landscapes and seasonal scenes as his lifelong creative themes. He is adept at using delicate brushstrokes and layered color tones to construct a tranquil and peaceful artistic atmosphere, accurately presenting the humid air, white walls, black tiles, small bridges and flowing water that symbolize the typical charm of Jiangnan water towns. His paintings are dominated by cyan-gray tones, appropriately embellished with willow green and peach pink, creating an immersive artistic conception of "mist enveloping cold river water". Regardless of seasonal changes, he captures the unique aesthetic temperament of Jiangnan scenery with personalized painting techniques, as reflected in his representative works such as *Warm Breeze and Gorgeous Autumn* (Figure 1), *Wild Interest in Summer Pond* (Figure 2), *Praise of Plum Blossoms at Bo'ai Pavilion* (Figure 3), *Spring Rhyme of Qiyuan Garden* and *Frosty Morning Mist*.



Figure 1. *Warm Breeze and Gorgeous Autumn* (Chen Shining).



Figure 2. *Wild Interest in Summer Pond* (Chen Shining).



Figure 3. *Praise of Plum Blossoms at Bo'ai Pavilion (Chen Shining).*

Chen Shining's paintings feature flexible and vigorous cursive-style brushwork, which expresses emotions directly with unrestrained strokes, bringing viewers a hearty and smooth aesthetic experience. In depicting Jiangnan water towns, his elegant color matching and delicate brush language fully interpret the tranquility and harmony of water town landscapes, endowing his works with strong artistic appeal and aesthetic tension. This unique painting expression not only reflects the artist's keen observation of natural scenery and unique aesthetic perspective but also embodies his profound understanding and persistent pursuit of elegant artistic implication.

Warm Breeze and Gorgeous Autumn takes the ordinary autumn scenery of Jiangnan as the creative object, including distant mountains, nearby trees and swaying autumn leaves. The artist captures the touching aesthetic moment hidden in plain daily scenery. The warm tonal atmosphere implies the harvest connotation of autumn, and the swaying branches and dancing leaves are like dancing figures, singing praises for the harvest season. By interweaving calligraphic lines and poetic emotions, the work presents the intoxicating autumn charm of Jiangnan and embodies the unique inner poetry of the artist. As Chen Shining mentioned in *Past and Future*, he is deeply affectionate towards the mountains and rivers of Jiangnan. He takes every spare time and holiday as an opportunity for outdoor sketching, preferring original ecological natural scenery and indulging in the dynamic beauty of swaying branches in the wind, which constitutes the source of his poetic creation.

3. Auditory Jiangnan: Poetic Rhythm of Sculling Oars and Starlight

As an outstanding artist with profound attainments in oil painting creation, teaching and theoretical research, Chen Shining is skilled at using harmonious color collocation and capturing subtle changes of natural light to construct elegant and diverse artistic scenes. The imagery of misty rain, flowing water and vivid figures in his works carries his deep affection for his hometown Jiangnan, presenting a unique aesthetic temperament of "poetry and subtle melancholy" and inheriting the traditional literati painting concept of "expressing emotions through scenery".

Chen Shining's creative themes are diverse. In addition to classic landscape paintings with distinctive Jiangnan charm, his figure paintings integrated with natural scenery fully demonstrate his comprehensive painting skills, rigorous modeling foundation and unique creative conception. During the localization exploration of Chinese oil painting in 2000, he integrated Western oil painting techniques with traditional Jiangnan cultural imagery, creating a large number of thematic works that have been exhibited in national large-scale art exhibitions and won many important

awards. Drawing creative inspiration from natural scenery and daily life, he extracted the deepest Jiangnan memory from his personal aesthetic experience and created a series of classic works, including *Misty Rain in Jiangnan* (Figure 4), *Fading Blue Memory* (Figure 5), *Dawn*, *Childhood Olympic Dream* (Figure 6), *Wedding on the Execution Ground*, *Nine Dragons Holy Land* and *Taihu Bay*. Among them, *Childhood Olympic Dream* won the first prize at the 5th National Sports Art Exhibition, was presented as a national gift to IOC President Jacques Rogge in 2005, and is now collected in the Lausanne Olympic Museum. These works jointly form his complete creative system of integrating natural scenery and humanistic spirit.

Misty Rain in Jiangnan, selected as an excellent work in the 3rd China Oil Painting Exhibition in 2003, represents the mature artistic style of Chen Shining's landscape painting. Centering on the tranquil and elegant artistic conception of misty rain in Jiangnan water towns, the work adopts green-gray tonal system adapted to the humid climate of Jiangnan, fully presenting the soft and hazy regional aesthetic characteristics. Through transparent color rendering and layered dyeing techniques, the painting strengthens the misty and ethereal beauty of Jiangnan rain scenery, forming a strong poetic atmosphere.



Figure 4. *Misty Rain in Jiangnan* (Chen Shining).



Figure 5. *Fading Blue Memory* (Chen Shining).



Figure 6. *Childhood Olympic Dream* (Chen Shining).

Set against the hazy misty rain background, the work depicts the gentle and poetic charm of typical Jiangnan water towns. Three rural girls in traditional local costumes are boating on the water, with vivid and distinctive expressions and postures. The girl in the front sits on the boat, holding fresh green fruits, with pink bellyband echoing the pink flower ornaments on her head. The tender green plants in the foreground symbolize life and hope, implying the vibrant vitality of Jiangnan land. The other two girls stand in the middle and rear of the boat, rowing hard with oars. Their simple costumes and fresh looks present the pure and beautiful spiritual outlook of rural youth in Jiangnan. With flexible eyes and vivid temperament, the figures interpret the instantaneous aesthetic beauty of water town life.

In terms of painting language, the artist weakens volume processing and adopts imagery expression techniques to shape Jiangnan scenery, creating an immersive poetic realm of misty ambiguity. He applies running-script-style brushwork with stable and expressive lines of varying thickness, speed, shade and lightness, writing out the unique aesthetic interest of Jiangnan scenery. The unrestrained brush strokes perfectly integrate object contours and natural landscapes, highlighting the tranquility and leisure of water town scenery. Combining splashing-oil texture and delicate

rendering, the work simulates the ink-wash hazy effect of traditional Chinese painting, constructing a poetic and dreamlike visual atmosphere.

Integrating typical Jiangnan cultural symbols, this work inherits traditional Chinese aesthetic concepts and innovates Western oil painting techniques. The hazy mist imagery embodies the implicit and introverted aesthetic pursuit of traditional Chinese culture, forming a distinctive contrast with Western realistic oil painting traditions. By blurring distant scenery and weakening object contours, the painting interprets the classical artistic conception of “mountains looming and rain rippling”. It not only conveys the artist’s deep love for Jiangnan scenery but also reflects his innovative integration of Chinese and Western painting languages. As Shen Xingong, a famous art critic and painter from Nanjing University of the Arts, commented, Chen Shining depicts scenery with cursive brushstrokes, vividly conveying the verve and charm of Jiangnan landscape in a hearty and unrestrained manner.

4. Sustainable Elegant Aesthetic Paradigm

Chen Shining’s painting art focuses not only on formal expression such as picture composition and color application but also on the inheritance and innovation of cultural connotation and aesthetic pursuit. He perfectly combines the artistic conception of traditional Chinese freehand painting with the expressive power of Western oil painting, forming a unique personalized style of “imagery oil painting”. With delicate processing of light, shadow and color, layered reflection effect and natural color transition from brightness to stability, his works construct a profound and hierarchical aesthetic space, praised as “consummate skill and appeal to both refined and popular tastes”. His creations maintain the elegant taste of pure art and convey sincere emotional power through full composition and vivid color expression, triggering broad aesthetic resonance among viewers.

Rooted in the gentle and moist cultural background of Jiangnan, Chen Shining’s elegant aesthetic system constructs an artistic world of supreme purity and beauty through freehand brushwork, poetic light and shadow and warm humanistic care, realizing the in-depth integration of Chinese and Western aesthetic spirits. In addition to classic Jiangnan water town themes, he also takes exotic landscapes as important creative objects. In depicting foreign scenery such as *Newport Harbor in the Sun* (Figure 7), *Capistrano Cathedral* (Figure 8), *Bar Under Renovation beside the Small Railway Station*, *Las Vegas Venetian Hotel*, *Catalina Island*, *Irvine Mansion* and *San Francisco Golden Gate Bridge*, he adopts bright and rich color collocation to create a mysterious and romantic exotic atmosphere.



Figure 7. *Newport Harbor in the Sun* (Chen Shining).



Figure 8. *Capistrano Cathedral* (Chen Shining).

Integrating modern aesthetic concepts into exotic landscape creation, his works present unique oriental poetic charm across regional and cultural boundaries, greatly enriching the cultural connotation and artistic value of his paintings. As Chen Shining elaborated in *Past and Future*, he attaches great importance to perceptual color experience in sketching creation, respects the natural changes of objective tones without being constrained by real objects. His core creative concept is expressing emotions through scenery, exploring artistic interest in the dialogue between human and nature, and pursuing the free and distant realm of freehand painting.

5. Conclusions

The elegant implication in Chen Shining's painting art is reflected in multiple dimensions of language expression, scene construction and spiritual connotation. He is good at extracting aesthetic elements from natural landscapes and presenting them through delicate brushwork and layered colors. By integrating personal sincere emotions into the picture space, his works possess strong artistic appeal and spiritual tension, realizing the perfect unity of realistic modeling and freehand artistic conception, and interpreting the oriental aesthetic realm of "lotus leaves stretch endlessly in the rippling river".

In summary, Chen Shining's painting art is distinguished by its unique elegant implication. His works show outstanding elegant temperament in picture presentation, color language and aesthetic pursuit. This unique artistic charm not only enhances the expressive force and aesthetic value of his paintings but also reflects his profound understanding and innovative thinking of contemporary painting art. Undoubtedly, Chen Shining's creation constitutes a bright pearl in the field of contemporary Chinese imagery oil painting, providing valuable aesthetic reference and creative paradigm for the inheritance and innovative development of Jiangnan landscape painting art.

Conflicts of Interest

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

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