

# Sun Xun 孙燮: A Comparison between Western and Chinese Painting Techniques 中西画法之比较

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天地自然之现象，吾人一触眼帘，即感快与不快者，实吾人心理，先已具无形之美情；因能鉴别自然现象，阳明所谓“良知良能，”郝智爾所谓“美的欲望”此世界生人所同具。

When I lay my eyes on nature, I either rejoice or despair. That is because I already possess the ability to sense the invisible beauty. Everyone in this world has what Wang Yang Ming called “intuitive knowledge, intuitive ability” (*liangzhi liangneng* 良知良能) and what Hao Zhier called “the desire for beauty”, which enables them to discern natural phenomena.<sup>1</sup>

惟此“良知良能，”，是即“美的欲望”。“美的欲望，”是即发见道德之基础。故近世学者，指美育而为德育。谓舍美育而言德育，徒劳而无功是也。

Only in this case is “intuitive knowledge, intuitive ability” the “the desire for beauty”. “The desire for beauty” originates from the foundation of morals. Therefore, contemporary scholars refer to aesthetic education as moral education. If aesthetic education is deserted, then there is no point for moral education.

然美育之范围甚广，其最易引起美感入胜者，则莫如图画，惟是圆画中画异趣，分类繁多。生人之境况习尚不同，而美感所受刺激，因各有强弱之分，美感既被习尚之羁绊，则习尚渐其真正？美之观念，而为畸轻畸重之判断；此吾所以有中西画法之比较也。

Aesthetic education has a very wide range. The one that attracts the most sense of beauty is nothing else but paintings, in which there is considerable diversity in the styles of Chinese and Western. The context of peoples' lives and the customs they are used to are different. As a result, the sense of beauty that is stimulated is different as well. A sense of beauty is intertwined with customs. Therefore, customs equal the sense of beauty, and the judgement is distorted. I hereby present *A Comparison of Chinese and Western Painting Techniques*.

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<sup>1</sup> James Legge translated “liangzhi liangneng 良知良能” as “intuitive knowledge, intuitive ability” in his book *The Chinese Classics. With a Translation, Critical and Exegetical Notes, Prolegomena, and Copious Indexes* (1861)

知中西绘画，同胚胎於像形文字；是中西画理，俨然同一源流写实派也。厥后文字简单，不足以饜美感之欲望；遂异趋殊途，脱离文字而独立。冯之中西绘画，均以人物为题材。

Chinese and Western paintings are both born to pictographs. They are both derived from realism. If the characters are simple, then they cannot satisfy the desire for beauty. And so, the paintings strayed from characters and became independent. That is the reason why Chinese and Western paintings focus on figure painting.

故西洋中古以前之绘画思想，多与宗教思想为混合之发达，而吾国绘事，亦随佛教勃兴而益盛。所谓宗教画是也。但所绘多神秘佛像。理想进步，则反去古画旨愈远。

Hence, before the Middle Ages, Western painting developed in conjunction with religion, while Chinese painting became more prosperous with the vigorous development of Buddhism – the so-called religious painting. But what these depict are mostly mysterious Buddhist statues. The idea of righteousness is progressing, but it runs counter to the intention of ancient painting.

此中西画派进化之公例，又俨然同一写意派也。由是以降，赞仰宗教之美情，又不足以偿美感之要求，于是审美思想，打破宗范围；而画派遂别开新面而独立。

This is the pattern in the development of Chinese and Western painting. It seems to be the same conceptualism just like the same freehand brushwork. From then on, the appreciation and admiration for the beauty of religion were not enough to satisfy the demand for beauty. Thus, aesthetic thought broke the category of religion, and the new school finally came out independently.

至是真正之美术诞生，而写实派以兴。始稍稍从事风景画焉，此中西画派进化之公例；所以一反古道，同一趋于写实派也。

This represents the birth of real art – realism from the rise. In the beginning, I tried landscape painting a little, which is the common basis of the development of Chinese and Western painting schools. Therefore, this practice departs from classical methods and tends towards realism.

盖吾国至东晋以后，绘画之士，多以南中山水为天然粉本。

In China, after the Eastern Jin dynasty, the landscapes of Nanzhong were often used as the basis for painting.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Nanzhong (南中): The ancient name of China during The Three Kingdoms period (220年–280年)

西洋则至甫盎欧伊 (1380-1440) 与其弟，首倡自然描写；厥后殆经几许之陶冶孕育，于是大进，惟是时之理想派，尚占一席之地，更经几代之潮流，于是中西画派，乃分道而驰。

In the West, Brother Francke (1380-1440) and his students were the first to advocate natural description.<sup>3</sup> After several generations of development, realism made great progress. At that time, the idealistic painting still occupied a place, but after several generations of changing trends, the Chinese and Western painting schools are far from each other.

中画则日趋于理想临摹，而每况愈下。西画则益重自然现象，而每趋进化，时迄今日，而优劣益别。

Chinese painting emphasized copying more and more, and it went from bad to worse, while Western painting paid more attention to natural phenomena, becoming increasingly sophisticated. The distinction between good and bad is growing now.

非果中画之劣于西画也，时后代临摹理想家，师弟相承，其去自然兴趣愈达；而所绘愈卑下矣。

It is not the case that Chinese painting is worse than Western painting. In reality, later generations copied from these ideal painters, passing skills from master to apprentice, increasingly destroying interest in natural representation. As a result, the painting got worse and worse.

故吾谓今日欲保存国粹，则改良画派，其为当务之急乎？

So, I say now, if we want to protect the quintessence of China (*guocui* 国粹), is it not imperative to reform the school of painting?

虽然，欲改革中画，非先从事比较中西画法入手不可；此吾篇研究之主旨也，今请略述管见于后。

To reform Chinese painting, it is necessary to compare Chinese and Western painting methods. This is the main idea of this article. For details, please refer to the following:

夫中西画法，其始同以轮廓描線，表现画材；后乃进步，加以渲染。

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<sup>3</sup> Master Francke O.P. (or Meister Francke, Frater Francke, respectively German for "Master Francke" and Latin for "Brother Francke") was a North German Gothic painter and Dominican friar.

Chinese and Western painting techniques both started with using contours to express the material. As they progressed, they mutually influenced each other.

西画再进，则注重透视投影。而全取色彩以表现自然现象之变化。其用笔尚硬秃。连笔则视物体之种类而定。似无法而有法。

As Western painting techniques progressed, they started paying attention to perspective. Colors were used to present the changes in natural phenomena. The strokes applied were quite stiff and rusty. How the brush was held depended on the object that was being painted. It was as if the absence of rules was the rule.

然必求敏活浑厚，而稍现笔势。其连腕多在简短之笔法。而以简单之笔法，表现复杂之现象，以求画幅之统一。

The pen stroke must be swift and rich; simple and short strokes require movement of the wrist. Simple strokes are used to present complicated cases for the integration of the entire painting.

故西画三大要件：曰形状，色彩，气势；言形状，则透视与投影法须研究也。言色彩，则气势与调色法必讲求也。言气势，则笔法，色彩，均衡，节律，调和，反衬，皆所宜知也。

So, the three important elements in Western painting are shapes, colors and the energy they produce. When it comes to shapes, perspective and projection method must be studied. When it comes to color, the energy the paintings produce and the toning are essential. When it comes to energy, pen strokes, color, balance, rhythm, consistency and contrast are known to hold the key to success.

中画惟有理想之透视。细查画幅各部，无一定之视平线。

Chinese painting only scatters perspective. If you look closely at the details of the painting, there is not one apparent horizon.<sup>4</sup>

统观全幅，觉每幅视平线多在画幅之上部。绘法以墨色为主，而注重轮廓结构，渲染，色彩，则其余事也。

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<sup>4</sup> apparent horizon: One of the technical terms for perspective, H.L., is a horizontal line that is parallel to the eye of the painter.

Throughout the painting, you will notice that every apparent horizon appears to be on the upper part of the painting. The painting is mainly based on ink and wash, focusing on shapes, contour structure, applying colors to a drawing and color harmony. The rest is not important.

其他光线空气，亦多未合自然现象，然其杰作，间有出自写生者。别有一种静雅高尚之旨趣，为西画之不逮。

Most of the light and air effects do not truly restore natural phenomena, but outstanding works, sometimes from the school of sketching, have a quiet, elegant and noble theme unmatched by Western painting.

至用笔多喜长锋，连笔似有法而终归于无法。

Chinese painters like the long blade best when they use a pen. Continuous strokes seem to have some patterns but in the end do not belong to any set rule.

然必须浑活劲秀，而见笔势之所在。其运腕运肘，多在长曲之笔法。时或以简单之笔，表现景物。

However, the strokes must be lively, strong and smooth to highlight the skills. One's wrist and elbow move to form long curve lines and outlining. Sometimes, simply a few strokes can show scenery.

则固与西画之理相同，至求画幅之贯彻，则又在章法之研究矣。故中画之六法曰：骨法用笔，气运生动，应物写形，经营位置，随类传彩，传模移写。

This is similar to Western painting, which requires painting to be harmonious but is also a study of some details key to the art of composition. Therefore, there are "six methods" (*liu fa* 六法) in Chinese painting:<sup>5</sup> The portrait has a vivid bearing charm, appearing full of vitality. The painter's description must be like the object. Composition requires effort and planning. The colors must be similar to the painted images and copy work.

其他六要六长，若细按之，则又与西画之理法多相似。然在近人观之，而优劣觉悬殊者，非言法者之不善，特后人用法者，未精研求以揭长补短。

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<sup>5</sup> Six methods: The standard and important aesthetic principle of ancient Chinese fine arts

The “six requirements” (*liu yao* 六要)<sup>6</sup> and “six virtues” (*liu chang* 六长),<sup>7</sup> if subdivided, share many similarities to the Western painting method. However, in the eyes of modern observers, the wide gap between good and bad does not mean that the person who put forward these methods is wrong, but rather that later generations did not study the methods carefully enough to reveal its strengths and compensate for its weaknesses.

乃一辈理想派家，代承师法，互尚摹古，致遭失坠也。

Generations of idealistic painters passed on, advocating the depiction of ancient painting, leading to the decline of Chinese painting.

总之，言自然之学理，则西画优于中画，言笔法之运用，则中画高于西画。若讲浑厚活泼，与画之终极，而欲表现个人之特性者，则又中西画旨所同矣。

Overall, in terms of natural realism, Western painting is better than Chinese painting. In terms of the use of brush strokes, Chinese painting is superior. If one speaks of the ultimate purpose of painting, simply and honestly, the pursuit of painting is to express individual characteristics, which is again what Chinese painting and Western painting have in common.

管见如此，尚希海内大家，有以教之。

That is my humble opinion. I hope that experts of the world are able to ask questions and help answer them.

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<sup>6</sup> Six requirements: Chinese painting terms. Six requirements for painting creation.

<sup>7</sup> Six virtues, Chinese painting term. The six virtues of painting techniques.