

## ANSAI PEASANT PAINTINGS: INHERITANCE OF CHINESE PRIMITIVE CULTURE AND PRIMITIVE PHILOSOPHY

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**Abstract:** Chinese primitive philosophy, as the unity of cosmological ontology, epistemology and methodology of the Chinese philosophical system, is a complete and mature philosophical system formed in the late primitive society as early as before the Xia, Shang and Zhou Dynasties. It is also the unity of the concept of Yin and Yang and constant life that is sublimated from the human-beings' basic cultural consciousness: life consciousness and reproduction consciousness. The Chinese primitive culture, from the painted pottery culture 7,000 years ago to today, from the underground archaeological culture to the group culture on the ground, is a plastic art based on the concept of viewing objects and taking images. It is a broad concept of fine arts that determines the philosophical view, artistic view, emotional temperament, psychological quality and national spirit of the Chinese nation. The most primitive culture and primitive philosophy in China have been preserved with extremely rich and complete historical remains in the group's cultural and social life. It is for this reason that China is the only country with an ancient history of civilization that has not experienced

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a cultural break. The primitive culture and philosophical system of China, as the philosophical basis and main connotation of ethnic group culture, are completely accumulated in the ethnic groups' social life. Folk art, which has accumulated the hundreds of millions of working masses' wisdom in China, is the mother of the Chinese national culture and art that has been inherited from primitive society until today with distinct national and regional characteristics. It is a long-standing cultural form with the longest history, the widest mass participation, the most distinct regional characteristics and the richest cultural connotation in the Chinese national cultural form. The rapid development of the times makes the traditional folk customs and folk arts, which are generally deposited in the rural areas of China, become precarious. As a result, the research advantages of the unique human culture and the original culture of China will cease to exist. Therefore, it is an urgent historical task to make use of this advantage to study the original culture of China and the philosophical genes of the Chinese nation. Protection is imminent, and inheritance is the historical mission, which highlights the deeper significance of studying primitive culture and primitive philosophy in modern society.

**Keywords:** Ansai peasant paintings. Life consciousness. Harmony of Yin and Yang. Five elements and eight diagrams.

## INTRODUCTION

Chinese folk art, with diverse styles and rich contents, is not only the artistic carrier of ethnic group life, folk activities-, and folk ideas. But it is also the implicit expression of the concept of interaction between Yin and Yang, survival and reproduction of all things based on the worship of life and reproduction in Chinese primitive philosophy, which has become the expression of group ideology. The Ansai peasant paintings created by rural laboring women have a wide range of masses and distinctive ethnic and regional characteristics. Its artistic form and cultural connotation are derived from the ethnic groups' culture and art. In addition, they keep the original chaotic thinking mode and collective unconscious inheritance to the maximum extent. Its philosophical foundation of it comes from the primitive philosophy of the concept of Yin and Yang and continued life. As also the resulting theories of unity of man and nature and identity of object and self. The unique artistic expressions, such as modeling concepts and coloring concepts derived from it, are the condensed crystallization of Chinese primitive culture and primitive philosophy.

The pursuit of life is the motive force of human artistic creation, which revolves around the primitive aesthetic psychology and the taste that sprouted from the admiration and protection of life and the ancestor worship and reproduction. It has continued from ancient times to civilized times. Ansai peasants, who put their adoration, love, and awe of life, nature, and universe deities in their paintings above the objective things, dare to violate the laws of

facts, exaggerate and transform them, and endow the objects with mysterious supernatural power, thus creating unique artistic language and modeling mode.

Women from Ansai peasant families drew lines with ink and painted their own paintings. They describe flying birds that are singing, laughing flowers and dancing trees, industrious people and flourishing livestock, rising dragons and leaping tigers, which are the praises of life and a brand-new world where people and nature coexist harmoniously. Peasants use simple artistic style, warm colors, eclectic forms of expression and pay attention to intentional expression and emotional expression to express their sincere and simple emotions. They express what they have seen, heard, and thought in their production and life with simple and naive painting techniques and loud colors. They also depict their desire and pursuit for a better life with intense colors and exaggerated shapes, and release their passion for life. In contrast to the Chinese literati's pursuit of "emptiness," "charm," and "artistic conception," the aesthetic consciousness of peasant paintings often embodies the most vigorous and vivid life tension. It reflects the most primitive, hottest, and sincere life consciousness.

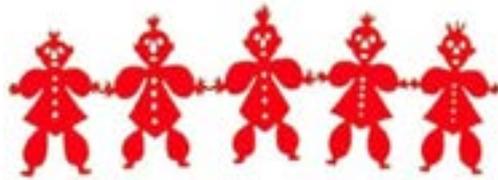
## **1 ARTISTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF ANSAI PEASANT PAINTINGS**

The Loess Plateau in northern Shaanxi, as one of the birthplaces of Chinese civilization, has extremely ancient and rich cultural relics. According to the results of the third national cultural relics survey, Ansai investigated and registered 549 cultural relics and 370 ancient cultural sites, including Yangshao Cultural Site and Longshan Cultural Site. So many ancient cultural sites are concentrated. This shows that the natural conditions in this area were suitable for the ancestors. In Asia, there are many cultural sites of the Shang and Zhou Dynasties, a large number of Han tombs, and more than a dozen Buddhist grottoes left over from the Northern Wei Dynasty and the Tang and Song Dynasties. They show that, before the Tang and Song Dynasties, there were many exchanges with foreign cultures, including Buddhism. Later, due to the destruction of vegetation, water and soil erosion, it evolved into the Liang Mao landform, which gradually brought traffic jams. As a result, the local culture developed and brewed in a relatively closed way on the basis of maintaining the culture before the Tang and Song Dynasties, thus retaining the extremely deep land of original culture of China. Hence, its folk art retains the vigorous

life, overall strength and momentum of a strong feudal society. The influence of Neolithic painted pottery, rock paintings, Han Dynasty stone portraits, Tang and song carvings, and paintings can be reflected in local folk art.

For example, the paper cut works of Ansai and Luochuan have preserved the totem arts of primitive society. The five hand-in-hand Gods of Five Orientations, as manifested in Dolls Holding Hands (Figure 1), have similar ornamentation to the Majiayao-type painted pottery basin with dancing figures (Figure 2) unearthed in Shangsunjiazhai, Datong and Qinghai. The Five Gods are five male dolls with round heads and tied hair holding hands. The painted pottery basin with dance figures depicts three groups of small figures holding hands on the inner wall near the basin mouth. Each group of five ones with headdresses and tail ornaments. The Cattle Ploughing by Bai Fenglan (Figure 3) depicts a big tree growing out of the body of a cattle, with the crown of a deer head and outwardly expanding and derived antlers, which is extremely similar to the Ploughing Drawing (Figure 4) of the Han Dynasty. This is a stone relief unearthed in Suide, which also shows the antler shape outwardly expanded from the cattle.

**Figure 1** - Gods of Five Orientations manifested in “Dolls Holding Hands” in the folk paper cutting



(JIN, 2001, p. 29).

**Figure 2** - Majiayao-type painted pottery basin with dancing figures



(JIN, 2001, p. 150).

**Figure 3** - Paper cutting “Cattle Ploughing” by Bai Fenglan

(YANG; CHEN; XIE, 1999, p. 48).

In addition, the theme and composition of Ansai folk art are deeply influenced by the stone reliefs of the Han Dynasty. Bai Fenglan has a paper cut work, the “Cattle Ploughing” (Figure 3). It depicts a big tree growing out of the body of a cow. The big tree has a crown, which one is composed of a deer head and antlers that expand and grow outward. The used technique of expression is extremely similar to the Han Dynasty portrait stone carving art unearthed in Northern Shaanxi, which is considered a totem pattern in the Longshan culture period. It provides a basis to study the inheritance of Chinese traditional culture and Northern Shaanxi culture. In the Eastern Han Tombstone Sculpture “Ploughing Drawing” (Figure 4) unearthed in Suide, the sculpted picture also shows the shape of cattle and antlers that expand and grow outward.

Stone reliefs in the Han Dynasty are concise and general in composition. The objects to be expressed are vividly represented by silhouette, which has a high contrast effect between black and white and shows a great influence on Ansai peasant paintings. Simplicity, boldness and great contrast are the unique styles of Ansai peasant paintings (FANG, 2003, p. 122). As mentioned above, by comparing the patterns of Bai Fenglan’s “Cattle Ploughing” with the stone reliefs of the same theme, it is found that there are many similarities in both composition and black-and-white contrast methods.

**Figure 4** - Han Dynasty painted brick “Ploughing Drawing”



(YANG; CHEN; XIE, 1999, p. 49).

Ansai peasant paintings are folk art forms that reflect contemporary real life with traditional folk styles, embody ancient traditions and rich life flavor. They have distinct national and regional characteristics. They were developed in northern Shaanxi in the 1970s by integrating numerous folk art forms such as paper cutting, embroidery, cloth art, dough modeling, cabinet paintings, Kang Wei Painting, and others. The Ansai farmer painters who have lived in the loess plateau of northern Shaanxi for generations took root in the deep soil where they lived and expressed their ideas and emotions in their paintings. As an unconscious creation, Ansai peasant paintings put together the language, life and desire of peasants. They are full of local metaphors and obscure folk meanings. Those paintings contain rich and profound philosophical connotations and are the inheritance and continuation of Chinese primitive culture and philosophy from the primitive society to today.

Through painting, the rural women, who have mainly created Ansai peasant paintings, have added a lot of warm atmosphere to their monotonous life. They have found a spiritual world where they can place their emotions and display their talents, making their life rich and interesting. It is worth mentioning that Ansai farmers' paintings are almost derived from paper cut art (FANG, 2003, p. 128). In painting, farmers first cut out various patterns with paper and put them into the composition. Then they use a pencil to copy them onto the paper and then outline them. Finally, they carry out decoration and color setting. With the image and composition like paper cut symbols, the customs, scenery and amorous feelings of rural life scenes are depicted and expressed in an approximate horizontal way.

Primitive totem taste, distinctive appeal and strong, abstract and exaggerated modeling are all characteristics of Ansai peasant paintings. Modeling-wise, the shape is simple and childlike, emphasizing physical characteristics and brimming with life. The pursuit of reproducing the real image and secular ideal is characterized by the pursuit of the entire block surface, which is primarily shaped by wide and thick lines and blocks, with rough and bold style, concise lines and extremely decorative features. In terms of composition, they pursue fullness and richness. They also pay attention to perfection and aesthetics, which are manifested by many and small characters, complete and scattered scenic spots, lack of perspective in composition and logical relationship between characters and scenery, things and things, with full pictures and straightforward images. Most of the paintings show the pursuit of a better life and good fortune and they are ideal, meaningful, general and sentimental. Artistically, they are highly subjective and free in personality. Everything in the world can appear, change and combine at will in the works, showing rich forms and diverse styles, reflecting the unique aesthetic characteristics of simplicity, purity, roughness, primitiveness, and truthfulness in the Loess Plateau of northern Shaanxi (MA, 2011, p. 127).

Ansai peasant painters actively applied the local culture to the painting art to express their unique composition, color, and rich aesthetic consciousness, thus forming their own style. It is really a new flower of ancient folk art.

## **2 THE CHINESE PRIMITIVE PHILOSOPHY EMBODIED IN ANCIENT PEASANT PAINTINGS**

The concept of modeling art is determined by the concept of art, which is determined by the concept of philosophy, thus forming a complete art system in which the concept of philosophy plays a decisive role.

“Where do people come from, and where do they go?” This is a philosophical proposition inherent in human beings. The primitive philosophy first revolved around the question “where do people come from?” Ancestors came to the conclusion that “men and women mingle with each other to nurture everything and create everything” from the phenomenon of human heterosexual communication and the birth of new life, which produced the philosophical concept of Yin and Yang: the answer to the origin of life extracted from reproductive worship.

In the philosophical system created by human ancestors, the concept of Yin and Yang and the concept of incessant life, with the connotation of “the combination of Yin and Yang and the endless life of all things,” constitute the core of original Chinese thought. This one runs through the system of Yin and Yang, Eight Trigrams and Five Elements, that represent the historical concept of the human beings’ ancestor. It also contains the concept of reproductive worship of the mother of all things (ZENG, 2019, p. 8).

Yin-Yang Eight Trigrams, as the original philosophical system of the cultural basis of the Chinese nation, originated from the Neolithic Age, in the primitive society, and are a great creation of the Chinese nation. Ancient ideologists used the concepts of “Yin” and “Yang” to explain the two opposing and mutually increasing material forces in nature when they saw that all phenomena had both positive and negative aspects. “Dao contains one Yin and one Yang.” (WANG; KONG, 2009, p. 259). “Therefore, in (the system of) the Yi, there is the Grand Terminus, which produced the two elementary Forms. Those two forms produced the four emblematic symbols, which again produced the eight Trigrams.” (WANG; KONG, 2009, p. 277). In the *Book of Changes*, the alternation of Yin and Yang is regarded as the fundamental law of the operation of the universe. It is considered that the primordial universe is the Grand Terminus, which is divided into two parts, namely Yang and Yin, which are called two instruments and are represented by “one” and “—” (namely, Yang trigram and Yintrigram). The two forms are further divided into four states, namely Taiyin, Taiyang, Shaolin and Shaoyang. They are further divided into eight trigrams, namely, Qian, Kun, Zhen, Xun, Kan, Li, Gen and Dui, which represent heaven, earth, thunder, wind, fire, water, mountain and river, respectively, whose core is Yin and Yang, namely, Kun and Qian Trigrams. The Eight Diagrams result from the seeing how things change and advance. Through observation of themselves, the reproduction of various animals and plants around them, the movement of the heavens, the earth, the sun, the moon, the cycle of the climatic seasons, the long-term observation and study of various relative concepts, orientations, the relationship between images and numbers, humans in ancient times gradually developed a philosophical system that included all-natural sciences. There is a vivid description of this in the *Xicizhuan*:

In ancient times, when Fu Xi ruled the world, he looked up to observe the celestial phenomena, bent down to observe the terrain, and observed the patterns of birds and animals, which were suitable for the earth, close to himself, and far

from all things, so he began to create the Eight Diagrams, in order to understand the virtue of the gods, and to compare the situation of all things. (WANG; KONG, 2009, p. 284).

Similarly, Lao Tzu said Tao is unique. Tao itself contains Yin and Yang. Yin and Yang intersect to form a state of harmony in which all things are born. All things are either shaded or exposed to the sun, and a new harmonious body is formed by the interaction of Yin and Yang". (LIU, 2021, p. 227). The idea that Yin and Yang are separated by chaos, that Yin and Yang are combined to produce all things, and that all things are endless is a generalization of the primitive system of Chinese philosophy and has become the central axis of the development of the whole Chinese nation. "Dao contains one Yin and one Yang," the fundamental law that Yin and Yang mutually generate all things in the universe, is also the fundamental law of art and aesthetics. (ZENG, 2019, p. 11). From primitive times to the present-day Ansai peasant paintings, the concept of Yin and Yang eight trigrams has always been the philosophical basis of folk art modeling.

Our ancestors have long recognized the relationship between the five elements, Yin and Yang, and human life in exploring the relationship between heaven and man and the changes of ancient and modern times. So, the idea of the unity of heaven and man began to sprout (LIU, 2004, p. 69). If the concept of Yin and Yang is mainly derived from the ancient ancestors' understanding of the reproduction of living things, then the concept of the five elements is mainly derived from their classification of the substances in the world. Our ancestors lived in the Loess Plateau of the Central Plains, which belongs to the North Temperate Zone, for a long time. Thus, what they saw in the four seasons were "many easterly winds in spring when vegetation recovers and everything is renewed; southerly winds in summer, with scorching sun and long days; westerly winds in autumn with withered plants and trees, and clear sky and crisp air; northerly winds in winter with short days and cold weather." Therefore, in the concept of five elements, these natural phenomena are summarized as four seasons (spring, summer, autumn and winter), five materials (wood, fire, water, and soil), five orientations (east, south, west, north and middle) and five colors (green, red, white, black and yellow). According to *Shang Shu-Hong Fan*, the starting point and basic point for exploring the origin of the five elements (JIN, 2017, p. 22):

Ji Zi said: “The most important are five elements, water, fire, wood, metal, and earth. Water is characterized by moistening and downward flowing, fire is characterized by flaring up, wood is characterized by growing freely and peripherally, metal characterized by clearing and changing, and earth is characterized by sowing and reaping, corresponding to salty, bitter, sour, pungent, and sweet. The “five things” refer to attitude, speech, vision, hearing and thought. In other words, we should be respectful in appearance and attitude, follow good advice in speech, be keen and thorough in observation, correct in discrimination and prudent in thinking. People who have a respectful attitude towards their subjects are serious, while those who speak properly will live in good order. Those who observe clearly will not be blinded. Those who hear wisely will be able to judge correctly, and those who think wisely will be wise.” (JIN, 2017, p.22)

Dong Zhongshu generalized the original worldview of Yin and Yang and the five elements as “Qi of heaven and earth combined into one, divided into Yin and Yang, divided into four seasons and classified as five elements” and put forward the theory of “Yin and Yang upcycling” of the periodic cycle. According to *Origin of Chinese Characters*, five means five elements (XU, 1988, p.738). Therefore, the “cross” symbol is an image of five elements, which is composed of the orientation concept of four symbols - four states - five orientations plus the meaning of the smooth passage, and its double-hook cross is the figure of the road. The five orientations are not only the concept of direction but also a cultural system. Black Tortoise, Vermilion Bird, White Tiger, and Azure Dragon, which are taken from the symbols of the four states, not only stipulate the animal image, but also stipulate their own different colors, each of which is endowed with the corresponding symbolic meaning of the five elements. The original philosophical thoughts of the unity of man and nature, Yin and Yang, and five elements are the human beings’ spiritual power in the process of adapting to nature, and also the basic rules of folk art modeling and color use.

The foundational concepts of Chinese philosophy include the theory of the eight trigrams, the five elements and Yin and Yang. They are profoundly ingrained in Chinese culture and serve as the general framework to comprehend everything that exists in the cosmos. The universe, the planet and society are all marked with Yin and Yang, creating a vast and distinct system of Yin and Yang that goes through the evolution of Chinese history and culture from the time of prehistoric society to the present.

Although each stage of the development of Chinese history shows relatively different cultural forms with the characteristics of the times, they are absolutely unchanged as the core of cultural genes. Human heredity depends on the inheritance of genetic genes, i.e., the inheritance of genetic units that exist in cells and have the ability to reproduce themselves. Similarly, the inheritance of human cultures depends on the inheritance of national cultural genes, i.e., the inheritance of national primitive culture and primitive philosophy. Ansai peasant paintings embody this inheritance, that is, a complete artistic system that is centered on the worship of life and reproduction, determined by the primitive Chinese philosophy of Yin and Yang and unified with the theme of ideas, the modeling of ideas and the colors of ideas.

### 3 CONCEPTUAL THEMES ROOTED IN CHINESE PRIMITIVE CULTURE AND PHILOSOPHY

Survival and reproduction are the instincts of all creatures, which can be passed down from generation to generation through the combination of Yin and Yang. As a culturally conscious human being, it is the most basic cultural consciousness and the most basic human desire to survive and reproduce. Reproduction worship, as a legacy of primitive social thought and culture, makes it natural for Chinese primitive culture and philosophy to discuss life problems from reproduction. Hegel (1997, p. 56) said: “[...] a basic concept running through the history of the origin of these arts is not the concept of spiritual creation, but the description of natural reproduction.” The *Book of Changes* says: “The greatest kindness of the heavens and the earth is to provide an endless environment for the universe and mankind so that all kinds of life can take their place and settle down.” (WANG; KONG, 2009, p. 281). The *Book of Changes* puts Yin and Yang into the heaven and the earth, believing that heaven and earth are living organisms full of vigor and vitality, and they can sympathetically incarnate and nurture life, that is, “The combination of Yin and Yang gives birth to all things, which is similar to the combination of men and women.” In the *Book of Changes*, the life systems of the universe are compared to the men and women’s reproductive experiences (WANG; KONG, 2009, p. 294). Guo Moruo (1964, p. 26) thought that, in the *Book of Changes*, the Yin hexagram (one—) symbolizes female pudendum and the Yang hexagram (—) symbolizes male genitalia. According to *Xicizhuan*:

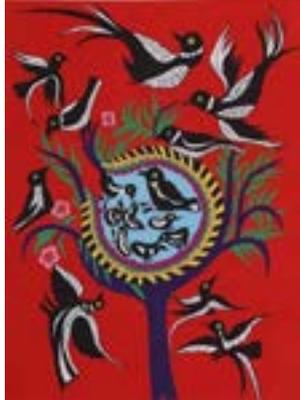
Both heaven and earth contain the two attributes of movement and stillness. The six strokes of the Qian Diagram are all Yang, pure Yang, and vigorous. When it is still and unchanging, it is single-minded and has nothing else. When it is moving and changing, it is straight and does not inflexible, so the vast universe is created. The six strokes of the Kun Diagram are all Yin, supple and sincere. When it is still and unchanging, it converges and hides deeply. When it is moving and changing, it spreads widely. Therefore, the vast universe is formed from this. (WANG; KONG, 2009, p. 262).

They refer to male and female genitals, respectively. As the philosophical basis and basic cultural connotation of Ansai peasant paintings, the original Chinese philosophy of harmony between Yin and Yang, which generates all things, and the endless life of everything, is the core of human life consciousness and reproduction consciousness. In other words, the harmony between Yin and Yang can multiply human beings' all things. And human beings' all things can live forever. This is a philosophical conclusion drawn by the ancestors of the Chinese nation who "takes abnormal changes in one's body and surroundings to make large and small situation judgments and result in predictions" by observing human beings themselves and everything in the universe. Therefore, the themes of Ansai peasant paintings are determined as wishes for reproduction, good health and long life, as well as celebration of life.

The adoration of this archaic Yin-Yang concept and replication are reflected in the theme of Ansai peasant paintings. Here, the idea that "the sin of not having offspring is the biggest among the three examples of unfilial" is still prevalent, and the continuation of life has taken on a central role in people's daily lives. A key indicator of whether Ansai peasant households and individuals have survival value and significance is whether or not they are able to bear children. The most prevalent and significant themes in Ansai peasant paintings, which also include Yin and Yang harmony, having offspring and heirs, and everlasting flow, are hence the praise and blessing of the reproduction of life. In the process of creation, Ansai peasant painters would choose some animal images with strong reproduction ability, such as mice, fish, and multiseed plants such as gourd, pumpkin, grape, pomegranate, etc., and take the maternal image of their reproduction of human beings as a symbol of women's fertility. They even chose some images that symbolize the happiness of the couple, such as cormorants and butterflies, which are happy and harmonious, waiting for their children to reproduce. In *Magpies*

by Gao Jin'ai (Figure 5), there are many magpies flying up and down around the tree, and the magpie nest on the tree is also painted in the shape of a big pomegranate. Instead of pomegranate seeds, a big magpie and several small magpies are painted in the middle of the pomegranate. This fruit is a symbol of having many children. It does not express only the beautiful implication, but it also has the taste of reproduction worship, which is quite symbolic.

**Figure 5** - “Magpies” by Gao Jin'ai



(YANG; CHEN; XIE, 1999, p. 6).

For example, the gourd, the most common image in Ansaí peasant paintings, is obviously the remains of female reproductive worship in a matriarchal society. The gourd has three meanings in folk art creation: first, there are many seeds in the gourd, which means many children and grandchildren. Second, the gourd symbolizes the mother of life. Third, the vines are covered with large gourds and small gourds, which is a metaphor for the numerous and endless descendants. The Chinese nation has a tradition of worshipping gourds. Liu Yaohan (1983, p. 136) wrote in the article “The Primitive Gourd Culture of the Chinese Nation” about “Gourd Worship” that “[...] there are many melons, large and small, on a continuous vine like people’s descendants.” means that the ancestors of the Chinese nation originally came from the common mother-gourd, which has lasted for generations and multiplied for generations. In fact, the gourd is regarded as the combined ancestor god of the intersection of Yin and Yang between men and women, which is integrated into one and divided into two halves: one for male and the other one for female. The intersection of Yin and Yang, between

men and women, is called “marriage.” Taoism regards gourd as Tai Chi. The idea that Tai Chi is divided into two and combined into one is also derived from the concept of reproduction worship in which men and women intersect and reproduce.

In Ansai peasant paintings, for instance, pieces like “Fish Playing with Lotus,” “Fish Biting Lotus,” and “Children in Lotus,” which allude to the fusion of Yin and Yang, are also men and women’s typical conceptual themes imagined through the close relationship between fish and lotus, and then alluded to in works by concrete and visual methods. The inherent traits of fish and lotuses are used by Ansai peasant painters to contrast fish and lotuses as male and female, respectively. The fish can freely play in the water and bump into the lotus. The lotus bud, blossoms, and bears fruit in the water under the mysterious arrangement of folk collective emotions, creating a particular image that symbolizes the men and women’s scenes from acquaintance to love, conception and childbirth. The basic idea of “fish and many children” is highlighted by Ansai peasant painters as they blend life and nature with vivid and concrete imagination, capturing the enigmatic sensation of reproduction worship.

#### 4 CONCEPTUAL MODELING ROOTED IN CHINESE PRIMITIVE CULTURE AND PHILOSOPHY

An important proposition in the *Book of Changes* is “images abstracting from viewing,” taking the images of Yin and Yang of heaven and earth. In *Xicizhuan*: “The sages want to reveal the mystery of all things in the world, so they draw the images of all things and the divinatory symbols to symbolize all things in the world, so they call them images.” (WANG; KONG, 2009, p. 266). Song Lian in Ming Dynasty said in the *Origin of Literature* that: “When did the literati show up? In fact, they first appeared in the era of Father Paoxi, who used the odd and even symbolized Yin and Yang after numerous observations, then accommodated them to circumstances to compile a natural article of heaven and earth.” (YE, 1985, p. 64). As the artistic creation principle of Chinese primitive culture, the creative aesthetic method of images abstracting from viewing has a far-reaching influence on the artistic modeling concept of Ansai peasant paintings (ZHANG; ZHANG, 2015, p. 79).

Ansai peasants’ concept modeling is often carried out in the form of images abstracting from viewing. “View” means direct observation and direct

feeling of external objects. “Abstracting” means refining, summarizing and creating on the basis of view to “achieve mastery through a comprehensive study of the virtue of the gods, to attach importance to the cultivation of heaven and earth, and to compare the situation of all things.” (LIU, 2006, p. 237). The theory of eight trigrams endows all things in the world with a fixed nature of Yin and Yang. Ansai peasant paintings focus on the structure, relationship and function related to the concept of Yin and Yang in modeling, showing the philosophical connotation of harmony between Yin and Yang and the five elements of heaven and earth. For example, the corresponding relations, such as “the sky is Yang; the earth is Yin, the sun is Yang, and the moon is Yin”, constitute the innate rules of collective consciousness and collective unconsciousness in Ansai peasant paintings.

The Chinese primitive culture, which takes abnormal changes in one’s body and surroundings to make large and small situation judgments and result predictions, has become the Ansai peasant painters’ primitive philosophical concept, which regards the sky as the Yang and the earth as the Yin (JI, 2012, p. 174). In Ansai peasant paintings, there are often modeling methods of the combination and mutual infiltration of two different animals spliced into one animal, two different plants spliced into one plant and heterogeneous organisms spliced and combined into a whole image by animals and plants, such as fish with chicken head, fish in the mouth of a chicken, etc. This seemingly casual and reasonable combination reflects the philosophical concepts of Yang and Yin, male and female, the unity of heaven and earth and the unity of Yin and Yang rooted in the original chaotic thinking.

For example, in Ansai peasant painting *Snake and Rabbit*, the snake symbolizes Yang and male. In contrast, the rabbit symbolizes Yin and female, which embodies the protection and nurturing of the descendants of the reproduction clan. It is an artistic language that expresses the union of heaven and earth and the intercourse between men and women, and an embodiment of reproductive worship too. Based on the philosophy of the relative relationship between male and female and the combination of Yin and Yang to multiply all human beings, the animal combined shapes in pairs are more abundant in Ansai peasant paintings, such as paired fish, deer and birds. All of which represent the concept of Yin and Yang with images abstracting from viewing. In Ansai peasant paintings, there are also double fish, double deer, double bird and other shapes (Figure 6) that rotate around the sky. For example, in the *Fish Pond* by Bai Fenglan, pairs of animals rotate in opposite directions, which represents the

endless symbol of the rotation of heaven and earth It embodies the inheritance of the philosophy that Yin and Yang are in harmony and endless.

**Figure 6** - “Fish Pond” by Bai Fenglan



(YANG; CHEN; XIE, 1999, p. 52).

The conceptual modeling of Ansai peasant paintings is often carried out in the form of images abstracting from viewing. “Viewing” means directly observing and feeling the external images. “Abstracting” means refining, summarizing and creating on the basis of viewing. In fact, conceptual modeling is not a simple imitation of nature but a subjective creation based on a deep understanding of natural images, which is based on objective objects and keeps a certain distance from them. Therefore, they created according to their own understanding of the inherent form of imagination. Instead of simulating the object, they are familiar with the secret memorials, attend to essentials and neglect the trifles, model with spirit. They obey their inner hearts. The holistic concept of the unity of Yin and Yang in Chinese primitive philosophy enables them to pursue the complete and thorough representation of things, not only by a visual fixed point but by all the perceptual and rational understanding to express the object and fully express the sentiment obtained from long-term observation of things in artistic modeling.

One of its manifestations lies in the pursuit of perfect modeling form. That is to say, Ansai farmers pay attention to completeness in their paintings (JIN, 2002, p.148). All the represented objects are completely and clearly presented. They will never draw half a person, half an animal, or half a plant when painting melons and fruits, such as gourds, pomegranates and pumpkins. The objects are often cut open to expose the inside seeds. When

drawing chickens, magpies, pigs, tigers and other animals, people can see eggs and cubs in their stomachs.

For example, in the work *Love Tiger*, some little tigers are decorated in the belly of the tiger. In the *Monkey Eating Cigarettes*, some little monkeys are decorated in the belly of the monkey, etc. Second, it overcomes the restriction of the rule of perspective by not modelling with the idea of Yin and Yang and the five elements, but rather by showing the front, side and back of the depicted objects in an all-around manner rather than adhering to the focus perspective of western tradition or imitating the scattered perspective of literati painting tradition. When painting houses and buildings, they used the concept of “five elements” to shape them (Figure 7), i.e. the east, south, west, north and center centered on me spread out the plane of the buildings, with all roofs facing the same center, and the figures and trees all falling down with their feet facing the center. When painting animals, their four feet all appear in the picture in the form of a “swastika” rotation of the five elements, such as the artistic modeling of the work *Grazing*. Third, they are not constrained by objective natural logic but are modeled by the concept of transcending time and space (Figure 8), moving time and space at will and expressing all objects (XIANG, 2003, p. 263). They put together flowers and fresh fruits, that exist at different times, birds, animals and houses, that appear in different places together, and the moon, sun, stars and colorful clouds in the same sky. Although it is not in line with natural logic, it is the embodiment of peasant painters’ subjective wishes. They decorate everything in the works at will to emphasize endless vitality.

**Figure 7** - Yin-Yang concept modeling in the Ansai peasant painting “Grazing”



(YANG; CHEN; XIE, 1999, p. 112).

**Figure 8** - The conceptual modeling of transcending time and space in the Ansai peasant painting “Farmyard”



(YANG; CHEN; XIE, 1999, p. 66).

## 5 CONCEPTUAL COLORS ROOTED IN CHINESE PRIMITIVE CULTURE AND PHILOSOPHY

The color system of Ansai peasant paintings is determined by Five Elements and Eight Diagrams, which is the explicit embodiment of the color of original Chinese culture and original philosophy. It is also the color system of original philosophy based on Yin-Yang and Five Elements and Eight Diagrams. It is not the inherent color view of Chinese classical humanistic paintings with the combination of the inherent colors of things as the standard, nor is it the conditional color view of the west with the change of light as the reference condition. The Chinese traditional five elements of Yin and Yang correspond to the five colors of green, red, white, black and yellow, and their correspondence and relationship with each other have led to the endless color view of Yin-Yang and Five Elements in Ansai peasant paintings.

In Chinese folk, there is a saying of five colors, namely, the three contrasting colors of red, yellow and blue plus black and white. According to *Yizhoushu· Xiaokaiwujie*, the five elements and the five colors are matched one by one:

If the three forces are clear, the five elements are fixed: [...] the five elements are “first, black is water, second, red is fire, third, cyan is wood, fourth, white is gold, fifth, yellow is earth.” Each color has the corresponding symbolic meaning of the five elements: “Green also symbolizes the color of life; Red, the color of the sun; Yellow, the color of the sunlight; White, the color of ice; Black, the color of darkness and gloom”. (PENG, 2004, p. 39).

In *Kaogongji*, there is a one-to-one correspondence between five colors and five orientations:

Painting needs five colors in juxtapositions. Blue symbolizes the east, red symbolizes the south, white symbolizes the west, black symbolizes the north, black symbolizes the sky, and yellow symbolizes the land. Blue and white are the two colors in order, red and black are the two colors in order, and black and yellow are the two colors in order. The match between cyan and red is called Wen (pattern), the match between red and white is called Zhang (emblem), the match between white and black is called fu (square patch on official costume embroidered with white and black axes), the match between black and cyan is called fu (an embroidery in square pattern on official gowns), and the five colors are called embroidery. The land is painted in yellow, and its image is painted in a square. The sky is painted with colors according to the changes in the four seasons. Fire is painted with a circle as a symbol, water with a dragon as a symbol, birds, beasts, snakes, and so on. It is called the skill of blending the colored parts of the five colors that symbolize the four seasons to make the colors bright. Every painting, finally with white. White will be used at the end of all paintings. (LIU, 2004, p. 445).

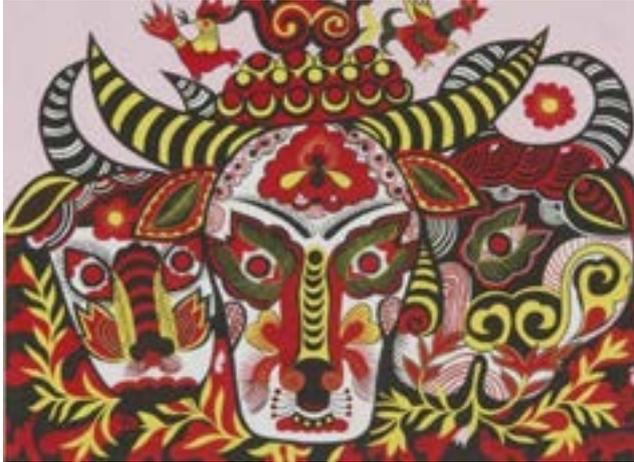
Namely, the five elements of tint are mainly white in the west, red in the south, black in the north and yellow in the center. The four seasons of spring, summer, autumn and winter go round and round, which is the Chinese concept of time. The matching of five colors and five elements is the tint of green spring, red summer, yellow later summer, white autumn and black winter. The five colors and five elements of the totem deities are matched to be the Azure Dragon of the East, White Tiger of the West, Vermilion Bird of the South, Black Tortoise of the North and Yellow in the Middle. The five colors and five elements of god worship are matched to be the green god in the east, white god in the west, red god in the south, black god in the north and yellow god in the middle. When matched with the five elements of gold, wood, water, fire and soil, it becomes the five-element tint with wood as green, gold as white, fire as red, water as black and soil as yellow. The unity of opposites and the development of Yin and Yang and the five elements form a colorful artistic system of Ansai peasant paintings (JIN, 2004, p. 81).

The main painters of Ansai peasant paintings, the rural working women, learned from their mothers to embroider from the age of four or five until their seventies and eighties. They are good at colorful silk and cotton threads based on the concept of five elements of color to show the ever-changing tint

that is either warm and prosperous or fresh and elegant, reaching a high degree of contrast, harmony and unity (WANG; MA, 2008, p.78). They formed the unique color view of Ansai peasant paintings with their profound color skills, which lasted for decades of practical training in tint. They all pursue high-purity original colors in the application of color tones, with strong and bright contrast, which enables people to feel warm and passionate emotions, exaggerated and abstract colors, and no emphasis on objective object colors. Ansai farmer painters, with strong subjectivity, understand and use colors according to traditional culture and utilitarian will, and express their love for life and pursuit of life continuity with “survival”, “avoiding harm” and “seeking goodness” as starting points.

In Ansai peasant paintings, the traditional Yin-Yang and Five Elements correspond to five colors and are used as conceptual colors, among which red and yellow are the most used, which come from the red sun and land, symbolizing nobility, joy and good luck, and showing the Ansai farmers’ strong desire to pursue a happy life. As the recipe for Ansai peasant paintings, there are sayings like: “the combination of red and yellow is bright”, “red and green express happiness, and yellow represents praise,” etc. They pursue a luxurious and bright color visual effect and reflect the moral of color. The strong contrast between the bright colors can produce a warm and festive feeling. Warmth and jubilation do not just mean congratulations and love for “life,” but also the warm and jubilant atmosphere itself can make people excited and directly experience the high sense of vitality and endless life. Xue Yuqin, an Ansai peasant painter, in her work “CattleHead” (Figure 9), left out other parts of the cattle in the composition and creatively connected three cattle heads in the whole picture, with concise outlines, big and bright eyes. High-purity red and yellow colors were used for flat painting on a large area. Small color blocks were used to distinguish the color blocks of large areas, so as to make a contrast distinction between front and back, distance and so on. Black and white were used for crispening and embellishment to harmonize large-area high-purity and strong contrast colors in the picture, so that the colors are gorgeous but solemn. This technique of ignoring the real image and depicting the exaggerated face and eyes, the application of high-purity native colors, strong and exaggerated colors, full of shock and vitality, are typical representatives of the concept colors of Yin, Yang, and Five Elements in Chinese primitive culture.

**Figure 9** - The concentrated embodiment of colors in the concept of Yin-Yang and Five Elements in “Cattle Head” by Xue Yuqin



(YANG; CHEN; XIE, 1999, p. 79).

The Yin and Yang and the concepts of life and progress, without superiors and inferiors, are embodied in the subject matter, shape and colour of Ansai peasant paintings. Yin symbolises the female while Yang symbolizes the male, Yin represents the soil and Yang symbolizes the sky. The idea of Yin and Yang represents the cycle of the four seasons as well as life, reproduction and the alternation of day and night. There will be germination in the spring, creativity in the summer, harvest in the fall and savings in the winter with the union of Yin and Yang. In essence, the Chinese people have sought Yin and Yang oneness throughout history in an effort to promote social peace and concord in daily life. From generation to generation, ancestors have approached and annotated this fundamental truth, piece by piece, up until this point in the restricted life process.

## CONCLUSION

In May 2016, President Xi Jinping (2016) pointed out at the Symposium on Work in Philosophy and Social Science that “every major leap forward in human society and every major development of human civilization cannot be separated from the knowledge transformation and

ideological forerunner of philosophy and social science.” Every great leap in the development history of human culture is preceded by the development of philosophy: the ancient Greek philosophy gave birth to the western civilization; the Chinese Fuxi culture, Eight Diagrams and Yin and Yang philosophy gave birth to the China culture.

Ansai peasant paintings, born in the folk culture life of China, continue a philosophical symbolic modeling method, or a philosophical schema, which directly points to the original system of Chinese philosophy and embodies the ancient Chinese concept of Yin and Yang and incessant life in subject matter, modeling and color. The working masses, engaged in grass-roots production, are the inheritors of this philosophy system, especially the rural laboring women, who are the main creators of folk culture and art in China. What they represent is the universe as a whole, which is neither a visual and intuitive natural simulation nor confined to the author’s personal expression of emotion, thus forming the artistic feature that their works are “beyond time and space.” They put the simplest philosophical ideas through all aspects of life and even dribs and drabs through artistic creation and, consciously, applied them to the evolution of new life folk customs in various periods, forming one of the most common social philosophies.

CHANG, Y.; ZHOU, L.; LU, P.; YASMEEN, S. Opere pittoriche dei contadini di ansai: eredità della cultura primitiva cinese e della filosofia primitiva. **Trans/Form/Ação**, Marília, v. 46, p. 367-390, 2023. Edição Especial.

**Riassunto:** La filosofia originale cinese è una sublimazione della coscienza culturale umana di base - la coscienza della vita e della riproduzione - che è l’unificazione del “Concetto di yin e yang” e del “Concetto di ciclo di vita “ in cui “lo yin e lo yang si uniscono per creare tutte le cose, e il ciclo dà una vita senza fine. La cultura originale cinese determina la visione filosofica, la visione artistica, il temperamento emotivo, la benessere psicologica e lo spirito nazionale della nazione cinese. Il sistema filosofico cinese, che rappresenta l’unificazione della cosmologia, dell’epistemologia e della metodologia della nazione cinese, è un sistema filosofico completo e maturo che si è formato nella società tardo primitiva molto prima delle Dinastie Xia, Shang e Zhou. La cultura originale cinese, dalla cultura della ceramica dipinta di 7.000 anni fa fino ai giorni nostri, dalla cultura archeologica sotterranea alla cultura di massa terrestre, è un concetto ampio di belle arti, determinato da una visione filosofica dell’arte plastica di osservare gli oggetti e prendere immagini. La cultura originale e la filosofia originale della Cina primitiva sono ancora conservate in un’eredità storica estremamente ricca

e completa nella vita sociale della cultura di massa. Per questo motivo la Cina è l'unico Paese tra le civiltà antiche che non aver subito una frattura culturale.

**Parole chiave:** Opere pittoriche dei contadini di Ansai. Il concetto di Yin e Yang. Il concetto di vita incessante. Adorazione della riproduzione (fertilità).

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