



COMMENT ON “AESTHETIC CONCEPTIONS AND CULTURAL SYMBOLS IN TRADITIONAL CHINESE PAINTING”

Tianyu Dong

Shinawatra University, Samkhok, Pathum Thani 12160 – Thailand.

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-9974-2568> |  dongtianyu1990@hotmail.com

Commented Article reference: GUAN, Yan. Aesthetic conceptions and cultural symbols in traditional Chinese painting. **Trans/Form/Ação**: Unesp Journal of Philosophy, v. 47 n. 4, e0240066, 2024.
Available at: <https://revistas.marilia.unesp.br/index.php/transformacao/article/view/14704>.

Received: 01/11/2023 | Accept: 10/11/2023 | Published: 27/02/2024

 <https://doi.org/10.1590/0101-3173.2024.v47.n4.e0240101>



This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License.

COMMENT ON “AESTHETIC CONCEPTIONS AND CULTURAL SYMBOLS IN TRADITIONAL CHINESE PAINTING”

*Tianyu Dong*¹

Commented Article reference: GUAN, Yan. Aesthetic conceptions and cultural symbols in traditional Chinese painting. **Trans/Form/Ação**: Unesp Journal of Philosophy, v. 47 n. 4, e0240066, 2024. Available at: <https://revistas.marilia.unesp.br/index.php/transformacao/article/view/14704>.

Guan’s (2024) main body is the thought of “aesthetic conceptions” in ancient China. This idea has been defined for a long time. It is one of the most important categories that constitutes Chinese classical aesthetics and it is also one of the raw materials that exerts the greatest value in the modern intersection of Chinese and Western aesthetics.

The creation of aesthetic conceptions is deeply influenced by Zen Buddhism, which makes it have characteristics different from images. “Conception”, in Indian Buddhism, refers to the five realms of color, sound, smell, taste and touch. Indian Buddhism believes that, in order to transcend the world, one must stay away from everything in the phenomenal world before entering the noumenal one. It can be seen that, in Indian Buddhism, the phenomenal world and the noumenal one are separated from each other. After Indian Buddhism was introduced to China, it achieved local transformation. Influenced by Taoist thought, Zen Buddhism no longer opposes the noumenal world and the phenomenal one, but it advocates that everything has a legal nature and the Tao can be enlightened in daily life. Eating, sleeping and walking all reveal the significance of “Tao”. The “conception” of Zen Buddhism refers to the metaphysical meaning directly present in daily life. Inspired by the “realm” of Zen Buddhism, artists continue to pursue a metaphysical life experience and are passionate about creating an artistic realm full of history and life.

¹ Shinawatra University, Samkhok, Pathum Thani 12160 – Thailand. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-9974-2568>. E-mail: dongtianyu1990@hotmail.com.

The emergence of metaphysics, in the Wei and Jin Dynasties, took a big step towards the formation of “aesthetic conceptions”. A large number of literary theorists, such as Lu Ji and Liu Xie, specialize in exploring the interrelationship between expression, imagery and meaning in the process of literary conceptions. Liu Xie pointed out in *Shen Si Chapter*: “Then in a state of tranquility and clarity (the mind and brain), one chooses and arranges words according to the rhythm, (like) a craftsman with extraordinary insight who creates literature based on imagery. This is the first principle of controlling words and writing papers and the basic essentials of planning the layout of the paper” (Liang, 2021, p. 68). He believes that, only by cultivating a good mind, one can use skilled writing methods to grasp images.

In *The Birth of Aesthetic Conceptions in Chinese Art*, Mr. Zong Baihua pointed out that aesthetic conceptions are: “The subjective mood of life and the objective natural scene blend and interpenetrate, creating a spiritual realm where kites fly and fish leap, lively and exquisite, and profound. This spiritual realm is the ‘aesthetic conceptions’ that constitutes the reason why art is art (Zong, 2017, p. 113).” It can be seen from this that situational relationships have become one of Zong Baihua’s methods of creating aesthetic conceptions. However, he did not simply follow ancient theories, but made more profound discoveries. Zong Baihua believes that, in a presented art, the relationship between sentiment and scene is interpenetrated. A scene can unearth a sentiment, and the sentiment, in turn, can deepen the scene there. Such continuous deepening will eventually reveal a unique new image and create a unique universe that has never appeared in the human world. It is a new realm created by the fusion and interpenetration of subjective life sentiments and objective natural scenes.

Regarding the main characteristics of ancient Chinese “aesthetic conceptions”, the general view is that it is reflected in the “coexistence of virtuality and reality”. In addition to the “blank space” in Chinese paintings, mentioned by the author in the paper, the “pause” of rhythm in Chinese music, the “stillness” in Chinese dance, the empty “space” in Chinese gardens and other expression techniques are all expressions of “empty” in the law of “aesthetic conceptions”, where virtuality and reality coexist.

“Virtuality” is expressed in the form of “blank space” in Chinese paintings, and its philosophical origins can be traced back to the Yin-Yang theory, in Zhouyi, and the Taoist theory of existence and absence. It is mentioned in *Yi Zhuan*: “One yin and one yang are called Tao.” *The Book of Changes* also records: “Qian is the sky and is yang, and Kun is the earth and is yin.” The sky is yang, so it is called the sun, and the earth is yin, so it is called Taiyin. If Yang leads the activeness, it will be majestic and passionate, while if Yin leads the calmness, it will be euphemistic and connotative. From the Tai Chi diagram in *The Book of Changes*, we can intuitively conclude that black is yin and white is yang. The opposites of black and white, and yin and yang, are unified and completely integrated into one. This philosophical concept is reflected in ink painting, as reality and virtuality, ink marks and

blank spaces. Gu Kaizhi of the Jin Dynasty mentioned in his painting theory: “The beautiful shape, the size, the number of yin and yang, and the delicate traces are all valuable in the world.” This shows that the penetration and development of Yin and Yang ideas played a key role in the situation and beauty of early Chinese painting. In addition, Zhang Shi also said in *Hua Tan*: “Black is yin, white is yang, and the combination of yin and yang constitutes the merit of creation” (Chen, 2017, p. 98).

Laozi believes that “all things in the world are born from existence, and existence is born from non-existence.” “Existence” and “non-existence” are interdependent and transforming, forming a dialectical unity of opposites. In the form of artistic expression, “real” represents “existence” and “virtual” represents “non-existence”. In this way, the relationship between “existence” and “non-existence” is equivalent to the relationship between “reality” and “virtuality”. For example, Laozi proposed that “the biggest and most beautiful sound is the silent sound”. Wang Jide’s *The Rhythm* said “the basis of drama is life experience, and the technique of expression is artistic fiction”. In Sikong Tu’s *Poetry*, “Creation should be implicit, with meaning beyond words”. “The ultimate purpose of appreciation”, in *Calligraphy Summary*, refers to the fact that the appreciator and the creative subject have transcended the feeling of the material form of calligraphy and reached the spiritual level of communication. In Da Chongguang’s *Huaquan*, “the virtual and the real are interdependent, and everything without paintings becomes a wonderful scene”, etc.

It can be seen that the corresponding relationship between “existence and non-existence” and “virtual reality” has been expounded in many categories of art theory. It can be seen that the theory of “virtual reality”, in the creation of artistic conceptions, is based on the theory of “existence and non-existence”, proposed by Lao Yizi. Basically, the role of the theory of “existence and non-existence” in the formation of the concept of “virtuality and reality”, in the creation of aesthetic conceptions, cannot be ignored.

Metaphysics of the Wei and Jin Dynasties has always been called the “resurrection of Lao and Zhuang’s thoughts.” Metaphysical thought condenses the nature of “non-existence” in the essence of “Tao”. Among them, He Yan and Wang Bi put forward the idea of “valuing non-existence and cherish virtuality” as the representative. *Jin Shu Wang Yan Zhuan* says: “In the middle of the Wei Dynasty, He Yan, Wang Bi and other ancestors stated the theory of Lao and Zhuang, believing that everything in the world is based on non-existence. Those who believe in non-existence can achieve success if they understand the principles of various things and act according to reason. It is something that has no place, but exists. Yin and Yang rely on transformation, all things rely on shape, the sage relies on achieving virtue, and the unworthy rely on it to avoid danger. Therefore, if non-existence is valued, no title will be noble (Liu, 2010, p. 215).” Regarding Wang Bi’s “valuing non-existence” thought, Feng Youlan believes that, in Wang Bi’s philosophy, “non-existence” is equivalent to “Tai Chi”,

in *The Book of Changes*, and “Tao”, in *Laozi*. However, the function of “non-existence” can only be clearly demonstrated in the form of “existence”. In fact, Wang Bi’s idea of “valuing non-existence” is consistent with the essence of “aesthetic conceptions” in artistic creation. “Aesthetic conceptions” in art does not exist in matter, but it is expressed as the subjective feeling of “non-existence” material existence. This subjective feeling is “virtual”, and the form of artistic expression is “real”. From the limited “real” art ontology, one can experience the infinite “virtual” realm.

It can be seen that both the Yin-Yang theory, in *The Book of Changes*, and Lao and Zhuang’s Tao theory, or the “noble” thought in metaphysics, are important foundations, in the formation of aesthetic conceptions, and have a profound impact on the creation of art and the formation of aesthetic conceptions.

REFERENCES

- CHEN, Z. D. **Yushantang Collection of Chinese Calligraphy, Painting and Literary Consciousness**. Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2017.
- GUAN, Y. Aesthetic conceptions and cultural symbols in traditional Chinese painting. **Trans/Form/Ação**: Unesp Journal of Philosophy, v. 47 n. 4, e0240066, 2024. Available at: <https://revistas.marilia.unesp.br/index.php/transformacao/article/view/14704>.
- LIANG, L. X. **Liang Liu Xie of the Southern Dynasties**. The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons. Guilin: Lijiang Publishing House, 2021.
- LIU, Y. **Book of Jin**. Beijing: Beijing Yanshan Publishing House, 2010.
- ZONG, B. H. **Aesthetics and Artistic Conception**. Jiangsu Phoenix Literature and Art Publishing House, 2017.