

## Viewing Pang Xunqin's Painting Aesthetic Purport from the Painting of Mountain Dweller in Guizhou

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### Abstract

**Pang Xunqin is a famous artist, designer and educator in China's 30's. After five years in France, he returned to China to study Chinese traditional culture. Although he led the modernist Sturm und drag of Shanghai Jue LanShe, he also experienced entrepreneurial failure and personnel discord. The trip to the southwest freed him from the past successes and losses and refocused him on learning traditional Chinese culture. Against the background of national turmoil and personal frustrations at that time, he gradually abandoned his individualism and embarked on the road of "art for the people". The Painting of Mountain dweller in the Guizhou series is an essential point in this road. Those paintings show the dialectical unity of the social beauty of the people, the natural beauty of the spirit and the artistic beauty of the content controlling form. Carding the aesthetic purport reflected by those pictures is more conducive to increasing the academic circle's learning understanding of Pang Xunqin.**

### Keywords

**Pang Xunqin; Mountain Dweller in Guizhou; Aesthetic; Social Beauty; Artistic Beauty; Natural Beauty; Art for the People.**

### 1. Develop from the Painting Concept of Pang Xunqin

Pang Xunqin (About the English name of Pang Xunqin. His paintings in Paris have the signatures of Pang Hunkin and Willankin Pang. Since the People's Fine Arts Publishing House's "Pang Xunqin Painting Collection" was translated into Pang Xunqin in 1998, it has become the mainstream of the academic and publishing circles. This article will continue to use Pang Xunqin's translation.), the famous painter, designer, educator, learned fine art when he was young, abandoned medical oil painting when he was young, and studied abroad in Paris in 1925. At this time, There were various schools of Painting in Paris and a vital breath of modernism. He absorbed all kinds of foreign cultures. "As a result, his brief dabbled in various schools of painting increased his knowledge and enriched his painting language and brush." [1] Nevertheless, he was not limited to imitation, which allowed him to think about the fundamental concept of Chinese and Western painting and explore his path. As Sullivan says, "Pang Xunqin explores his art road in the process of breaking away from the French art tradition [2]." He did not follow the trend and insisted on using poetry as the theme and brush as the carrier for a long time to practice line drawing composition and exercise his creative ability. After passing through the youth's uneasiness and confusion and taking the initiative to stay away from the temptation of fame and wealth, he found that "those who sprout from that soil can only grow, blossom and bear fruit of the same soils!"[3] The idea of going back, going back, grew and sprouted. In addition, he met a respected Art critic in Paris at this time. "China has an excellent art tradition. I heard that you want to go back to China, and I think that is right. You go back and study hard for ten years. [4]" Bidding farewell to the exotic land that nourished him, he decided to return to China. One of the goals of returning is to learn and understand his country's art and continue to explore his path.



Fig 1. Such Paris



Fig 2. Such Shanghai

Pang Xunqin came back from studying in France in 1930, continuing the constant exploration of the painting style. *Such Paris* (As shown in Fig 1) and *Such Shanghai* (as shown in Fig 2), created at the beginning of returning to China, show Paris and Shanghai's modern commercial city atmosphere and a modernist, Parisian style Pang Xunqin. Through the help of associations and interpersonal circles, the promotion of Shanghai newspapers and media has shaped and magnified the image of a modern and revolutionary young talent who challenges old rules and regulations in the painting world and intends to turn the tide.

Actually, at the beginning of Pang Xunqin's return to China, he studied Chinese traditional culture and painting theory in his hometown and learned his country's art again. The results can be seen in the "Guxuan Essays" column in the newspaper at that time. "He did not want to introduce European modernist art to China or play a radical role in culture, but to find a real solution to the problems of Chinese art from tradition." [5] At the same time, he was looking for personal development and went to Shanghai to look for opportunities.

His experience in France helped him expand his network, and Shanghai was also a big stage for his talent. With the help of his friends, he first gained particular popularity in Shanghai and then unit other modern painters that did not want to be classified to form the modern "Jue LAN Society" alliance. Due to the different opinions of its internal members, the fundamental economic problems, the change of the current situation and the change of the historical mission, jUE Lanch could not continue until the fourth term. At last, Pang Xunqin pays his debts by himself. His painting "Son of the Earth" (as shown in Fig 3) reflected the reality of famine, rural bankruptcy and family destruction, which caused a tremendous response. "In the painting 'Son of the Earth', I drew a stiff dying child, a farmer-like man, holding the child with one hand and making a fist with the other. The child's mother covered her face and cried. I did not draw them as scrawny and ragged, but they were healthy, and I used them to symbolize China. I used the child as a symbol of the Chinese people. I believe China will get out of poverty one day, and Chinese people will become great painters one day. However, since the painting 'Son of the Earth,' my aesthetical ideology has changed [6]. Although depicting the brutal scene of a child starving to death in his father's arms, the picture is still simple in colour, giving people a sense of quiet beauty. The painting received a warm response from society and won the grand prize, which caused the Kuomintang authorities' warning, but he did not withdraw the painting and compromise.

The war even made advanced knowledge go bankrupt one after another. Pang Xunqin mentions in his chapter "Poverty of the Intellectual Class", seeing with his own eyes that one of his friends who used to have cars and houses now eats only a bowl of broad beans, which they grow by themselves, while their two children fight over each other his friends cry. Some of his friends went to beg (see Fig 4). his paintings reflected these shocking realities.



**Fig 3.** The son of the land



**Fig 4.** Begging of intellectuals

With the heating up of the war, national disaster, everywhere sad. Pang Xunqin is also embarrassed by his economy. For this reason, he starts Daxiong Industrial and Commercial Art Association and wants to be an advertising company. However, because the design idea is too advanced, the business model and the grasp of the market are not as good as Zhiying studio in the same period and so on, he only persists for one year and fails. He had a deeper understanding of the relationship between personal destiny and the destiny of the country and The Times: "Painting only focuses on the expression of personality, which is meaningless; An artist should have his personality, but expressing his personality is not the goal, not for the sake of expressing his personality, but should be combined with The Times, the rise and fall of the nation. [7]". His life goes deep into the reality. All of the above reflects his process from simply understanding and learning the national culture to identifying and practising the concept of "art for the people" with his life experience. His aesthetic purport of affinity to the people has already begun.

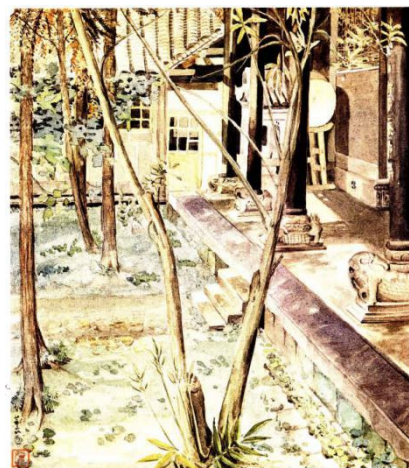
The conscience and sense of responsibility of senior intellectuals and his positioning after practice, he left Shanghai to teach in Hangzhou, hoping to cultivate talents. In front of the precipitous social problems and reality, there were many discords in administrative affairs, and he was in a difficult position in the university. He leaves his work finally. Complicated administration and interests made people feel depressed, and the social atmosphere of war and surrender made people heartbreak and panic. The central government and major institutions had to move to the southwest, and he and his family also went to Yunnan. Under this opportunity, the investigation of ethnic minorities made him see an environment different from the past (See Fig.5, 6).





關縣小景 Guanxian's Scenery 1940年 18.4×26.5cm

**Fig 5.** View of Guan County



江南廟 Jiangnan Temple 1949年 28.3×26cm

**Fig 6.** Gilxiang Temple

These last few years have been more than a mess. As Pang wrote in his diary, "Struggling with poverty or death for several years.[8]". In 1939, he served as the Research Institute of the Preparation Department of the Central Museum in Kunming, worked with many later famous masters and came into contact with many traditional artworks, which started the research on the decorative patterns of Chinese dynasties. He was able to settle down and accumulate motivation to conduct pioneering research on his work in the past experiences, such as the failure of Julan Society, the bankruptcy of Daxiong Industrial and Commercial Art Society, the boycott of college students the pressure of war. When he received the job of investigating the folk art of Guizhou ethnic minorities, he resolutely went there. This historical background and personal experience gave birth to the Paintings of Mountain Dweller series in Guizhou.

## 2. The Aesthetic Purport Reflected in the Series of Mountain Dweller in Guizhou

At this time, China faced an unprecedented crisis of national subjugation, regardless of status, struggling for survival. They faced many difficulties in their investigation of ethnic minorities, such as having to leave their hometown to the remote areas, =inconvenient transportation, lack of food and accommodation. Moreover, even in the most challenging times, crowding with other refugees in the temple is a warm-up for the night. Even so, the war of resistance continued to deteriorate. The ethos of the new culture movement still exists. People of insight have heated discussions about why the country has fallen to this point and where the way out of the society is, forming a social solid, ideological trend. Under this influence, the art circle is also hotly debating where Chinese art is going. If the country's way out is to learn western modernization, then does Chinese painting need modernization? How to modernize if necessary? At that time, one way was the "art revolution" advocated by Lv Hui and Chen Duxiu, which gradually evolved into the left-wing art movement to change the king's painting. The second mainstream way is the "Integration of Chinese and Western" school, such as Lin Fengmian and Xu Beihong, which integrate Chinese and Western in different ways. Then there are the conservatives who advocate total westernization, parody and copy, or stubbornly adhere to tradition.

Pang Xunqin is more inclined to the second way of integrating China and the West. On the one hand, he believes that it is impossible to produce good art by simply putting together the different forms of the West and China with technology. Because technology as a means is not equal to sound art, the focus of the performance is the spiritual temperament of China. His thinking continues to study his country's tradition and constantly explore his way. He thought that modernism and left-wing art movements were hot, but the tradition must be combed and

inherited; otherwise, the tradition would not develop and regenerate. Throughout Chinese history, we were able to assimilate and absorb foreign cultures. We were the dominant culture for our use, forming the spirit of The Times and becoming the tradition of later generations.

On the other hand, each country's national spirit and culture are different, so "foreign" and "Chinese" should tolerate and learn from each other, rather than create opposition. We should base ourselves on the roots of our nation, absorb foreign cultures and pursue the inherent spirit of our nation. In his opinion, the question of where Chinese art should go first is to restore the national status, be responsible to the world, help the poor and eliminate imperialism. The second is to realize nationalism, accept the inherent characteristics of the heritage and spirit of our ancestors, and create sound art. "The great times make me gradually forget the ego. Maybe I can step into another realm." This chaotic era, in the eyes of the active observer, "gives him a chance to revive." He wanted to "do more useful work" for ethnic minorities and "burn more of his strength and light for the country with an indomitable and creative spirit". The way he wants to go is to preserve the quintessence of Chinese culture because traditions need to be studied and guarded. Inheritance and innovation, because "while passing while unifying" can glow the vitality of Chinese culture and art. (See Fig 7 and 8)



**Fig 7.** Mountain Dweller in Guizhou In full dress



**Fig 8.** Mountain Dweller in Guizhou In backpack basket

### **3. Social Beauty: The Simple Beauty of Life**

"Why do I not often write about the dark side of society? Because now I think it is better to write about light than darkness; Life needs art, art can encourage people.[9]" So he was able to

transcend the immediate embarrassment and discover the vitality of life. The clothes he painted are vivid and full of patterns with national characteristics. "He did not see the weather-beaten scars and wrinkles on the surface of the worker skin but perceived the 'beauty' and romance of his spirit. [10]". He has the consciousness and cares for the fate of others and groups of senior intellectuals because there are more people in his heart, just like Lu Xun's "endless people and endless distance are related to me", under the influence of *The Times*. The trend of thought, his concept of art for the people, is more robust.

After his inspection and creation in Guizhou, he wrote the preface "Self-Dissection" for his exhibition. "My great-great-grandfathers, great-grandfathers and fathers were all so-called 'Ancient Chinese scholar'. Although I have not read many books, I have inherited their temperament. Therefore, my paintings tend to be literary, and they seem to be literary paintings rather than paintings. I think the truth lies not in shape but the heart [11]." His family's influence, personal knowledge, and experience help him express the beauty of the people in art.



**Fig 9.** Mountain Dweller in Guizhou Jumping Field



**Fig 10.** Mountain Dweller in Guizhou Orange Season

In addition to interest in ancient patterns because of the southwest period, he said, "I saw those girls sat on a stone under sunlight to embroidered with a variety of decorative patterns without any pattern, papers. They just took the needle, with their imagination, according to the adornment of the traditional structure to create. Even not all is perfect; it is never a waste. Because they respect their labour and cherish the cloth, the thread because it did not come easily. [12]" He considers what he sees others feel about their craft and solidifies it with his brush. "The people" was no longer an abstract concept, nor was "the beauty of the people" even as he saw them seeking truth, goodness and beauty despite their poor lives. Their respect and love for their labour seem to shine. This love and creation ability surpasses the embarrassment



of the present material and the ignorant prejudice of others, which deeply shock Pang Xunqin. "The nature of craftsmanship lies in the fact that craftsmanship is not only an exquisite skill (which modern industry can do more perfectly) but also a daily way of life for craftsmen. Handicraft is also related to the craftsman's spiritual pursuit and is the product of the craftsman's belief [13]." (See Fig 9, 10)

Labour makes people become people. People's sociality is also extending in labour. Social beauty reflects in it. "Social beauty is a positive, affirming image of life. Social beauty, in essence, is the direct embodiment of human nature freedom. [14]" Social beauty directly reflects people's free creation: As Zhou Yitao said in Miao Embroidery in Cultural Change, "People specialized in crafts have a life attitude that regards crafts as life. These are the two meanings. First, they love to craft, their preferences and make a living together, so have a strong professional dedication....." "Second, the craft is their food and clothing parents. They rely on their own handwork to obtain happiness in life. Therefore, they do not hesitate to put into the craft, to obtain the inspiration of the craft. [15]". The integration of the people, deep into the minority groups, can deeply understand the implied meaning of these decorations, will not be satisfied with the status quo, feel that their treatment of decorative decorations is depressed and incompetent realistic, sacrificing the vitality of the characters.

His paintings of ethnic minorities are more about the costumes and scenes of their daily life and labour and stand in the position of equal appreciation, rather than deepening the prejudice and imagination of the outside world against others with an eye for novelty: It is not the symbolic landscape of "wearing colourful clothes, twisting Miao dance and wearing silver ornaments" from the perspective of "superficial and vulgar seeking for novelty", but the connotation of beauty and poetic meaning is dug out from the most ordinary daily moments such as fishing, carrying water, selling wood and washing clothes, trying to outline a romantic and tranquil image of Arcadia.[16] He thinks it is irresponsible, gives the impression that China is backward and does not show people's lives. What is more, there are so many hardships in the world, and he wants his paintings to show the sweetness of life. "It is better to write about hope than darkness."



**Fig 11.** Mountain Dweller in Guizhou Huangguoshu Waterfall



**Fig 12.** Mountain Dweller in Guizhou Chishui



**Fig 13.** Mountain Dweller in Guizhou Shoot card

Social beauty attaches importance to content: human body beauty. The women in his writing are all classical, traditional Chinese beauties and agricultural society. "The Miao working women depicted by him are simple, quiet, elegant, plain and far away from the troubled world. They are neither the concept of urban beauty nor graceful appearance. It is a modern form of decorative elements and has a very classical connotation of a style. [17] He also wanted to reflect their beauty. "The beauty of birds is in their feathers, and the beauty of people is in their diligence." The villagers are working hard to live in such dire conditions. In order to change a little bit of salt, they had to cut a lot of cash in on wood and then walk down the hill. However, their pursuit of beauty is heartfelt, have the free will to embroidery, embroidery is their works of art, social activities, and beliefs. The labouring person is pang Xunqin's painting subject. (Fig 11, 12, 13).

"Ethnic minority women's quiet, light and gentle characteristics are more suitable for shaping ethnic minority compatriots' simple and kind modern image. as well as lyrical romantic, aesthetic and quiet poetic space and their dress can also highlight the formal beauty of ethnic minority clothing [18]." (See Fig 7, 8, 9 and 10) Unlike the luxurious atmosphere of the commercial calendar card Shanghai beauties, Miao women's expressions are calm, simple, and elegant. They are dressed in costumes, showing the social beauty of the unity of form and personality. There is a kind of simple moralism and idealism here. This moving and aesthetic pleasure is one of the driving forces to paint and express the place after leaving it.

#### **4. Natural Beauty: The Beauty of the Acadian-like Landscape**

It can say that the relationship between man and nature is the transformation and coordination of nature that is gradually formed and developed in practice and makes it a relationship used by himself. It is also in this process that natural beauty unfolds itself history [19]." The Chinese people's aesthetic experience of nature does not simply stop at the appreciation of the appearance of nature. However, obtained after truly understanding the inner connotation of nature." Chinese people have always had unique and infinite poetic feelings for landscape nature. In history, countless exiled or self-exiled literati expressed their love in the landscape, with or open or relieved state of mind aesthetic nature, highlighting the spiritual side of nature. In this sense, the natural landscape is sacred. in terms of material conditions, Guizhou's mountain dwellings can be called "the land is not three feet flat, the sky is not sunny for three days, and the people are not one-third of the silver". "It needs to be mentioned that for Pang Xunqin, who is from an inland city, Guizhou's remote ethnic minority areas have different natural scenery and customs, different from those in the Central Plains. and their strangeness novelty stimulates the artist's visual senses and emotions at all times. [20]" Here is not an artificial reinforced concrete, the gap between the rich and the poor, no money, no power



challenging to do things in the modern city, but in the embrace of the nature of peace, poverty, stability, kindness and equality, simple people in the mountain landscape, here, the war beacon temporarily out, simple people.

Most of the "Mountain Dweller in Guizhou" works painted with the beautiful and ethereal southern landscape, rather than the dangerous mountains and rivers in the traditional impression. "In his writings, the peaks and mountains are continuous, the ridges are undulating, the forest is smoky, and the streams are meandering, which makes people feel that the painting is distant and plain, natural and innocent, and renders a hazy, elegant, and endless poetic realm [21]. His background is quite the style of Chinese Song Dynasty painter Mi Fu. On the one hand, there is often "no three sunny days"; indeed, there are often clouds and rain. On the other hand, he has deep feelings towards his hometown Yushan, and on the other hand, the painter's peaceful and tranquil state of mind. He said: "I was born in Yushan. In the eyes of people born in the southwest and northwest, Yushan is just like a mound. So maybe because of this, I do not have a majestic momentum in my writing. It can see that Yushan is step by step and beautiful. It is a pity that I did not get its beauty in my writing. Yushan is near the lake and sleeps in a blue-grey world all year round. Although I hate the idleness of my hometown, I love the lakes and mountains in my hometown [22]. In the picture, there are also many light blues (as shown in Fig 4) realistic pictures of the southwest frontier, which is overgrown with trees, and he transforms it into a graceful Acadian-like land. That picture is also the embodiment of the artist's calm mood.

The beautiful scenery of Yushan and Jiangnan has subtly cultivated Pang Xunqin's poetic life realm and mind-blowing character. His mountain people map series expresses the customs and way of life of local ethnic minorities, with both romanticism and realism. Although he borrowed photos, he transformed the difficult frontier life into a poetic utopia, sublimated from reality to aesthetics, and expressed his spiritual destination.



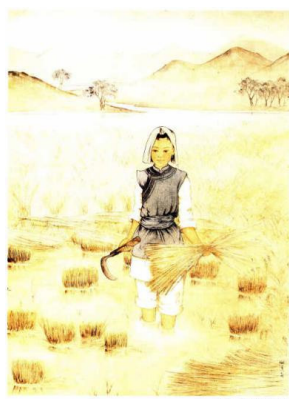
Fig 14. Fishing

Fig 15. Drinking of Miao people

## 5. Artistic Beauty: The Unity of Content and Form

On the one hand, In terms of content, the above works reflect the life content and reproduce the unique customs, production methods and living habits of the Miao people. Compare the

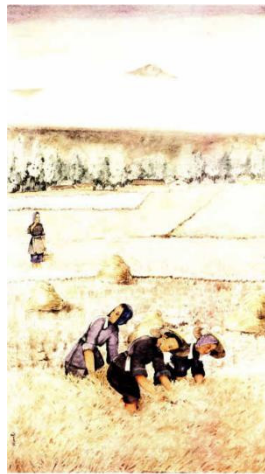
distribution and clothing characteristics of Miao people in different regions. These vividly represent various characters, dynamics, costumes, and life scenes. [23] His ideas are not limited to one art category but draw on his other artistic interests. He liked music when he was a young man in France, and even struggled with the tearing of his energy by music and painting, and even fell in love with Beethoven in his later years. He said: "To engage in decorative arts, you must understand music because music is an abstract thing, full of beautiful illusions.", "There is also poetry, an art expressed in abstract forms, which is extremely beneficial to decorative art. [24] His bones' "literary temperament" makes his decorative art, like his own style, full of rhythmic beauty and poetic sentiments.



**Fig 16.** Rice Harvesting



**Fig 17.** Cold Forest



**Fig 18.** Harvesting



**Fig 19.** Sentiment Language

On the other hand, in terms of art form, the paintings in this series are relatively light and elegant, with low saturation. It was partly due to the shortage of oil paints materials brought about by the war that he turned to watercolour. However, the more reason should be the control of the form by the spiritual connotation that he wanted to express. This content showed his emotional experience and value judgment, his Life perception and creative motivation. During the three-month inspection, he integrated local folk customs and participated in funerals, weddings, moon jumping and other ceremonies. He was also amazed at the women's grasp of their patterns and respect for their labour. His paintings have the three-dimensional effect and colour brush skills of Western oil paintings, but they also tend to show Chinese feelings in flatness and line skills. The unique style of his painting is becoming more and more mature. In terms of colour, the bright and vibrant colours of ethnic embroidery are softened,

and the prototype of the pattern is very respected. In terms of colour temperament, it is like changing from a fierce symphony to a lively and lively serenade, expressing a warm and leisurely feeling while the painted. It is the daily life that people yearn for during the war. (As shown in Fig 16-22) It is the sincerity that penetrates into the people, for the sake of the people, that he knows what they think and love.



Fig 20. Punting



Fig 21. Fishing



Fig 22. Jumping Flower

## 6. Summary

Pang Xunqin's life was full of ups and downs. From being soaked in the modernist atmosphere of Paris, returning to the Chinese art tradition through criticism, experiencing high spirits and failure to start a business in Shanghai, and facing the war and the unsatisfactory work in the turbulent times, we share the same destiny with the people. He Rooted in the people and the land, then finally explored a new realm in an obscure southwest corner. He finds his path by integrating China and the West in practice and the ancient and the modern.

After his investigation in Guizhou, Pang Xunqin's series of paintings of mountain people continued his idea of returning to Shanghai from Paris to study and explore the path of his national art modernization. From Shanghai to Guizhou, there was also a "sudden change of style", but because he always After learning the culture and art of my own country, and demanding myself with positive beliefs and behaviours, turning the disadvantage into the advantage, and seizing the opportunity of the times when I moved to the south and went deep into the mountainous areas of Guizhou, I not only explored my own unique style in painting but also in spirit. There are also new precipitations. Through the investigation of ethnic minorities in Guizhou, he created the series "Mountain Dweller in Guizhou", which "turns real suffering into art". It does not eliminate suffering but encourages and reminds people to look at the world's sweetness, expressing the social beauty of the toiling masses, natural spiritual beauty, poetic artistic beauty, the dialectical unity of the three. Standing in the position of the poor mountain people, Pang Xunqin used his art to "do more useful work" for the people, reflecting his aesthetic purpose of "art for the people". His "Mountain Dweller in Guizhou" series of works shows the yearning of the toiling people for a better life and reflects the artist's high life philosophy and aesthetic interest.

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