

# Study of Color Expression in Contemporary Landscape Painting

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## Abstract

Chinese landscape painting has a long history, and the use of color in it has never been separated from the picture. In today's background of the fusion of Chinese and Western painting and diversified modern art, the color expression in contemporary landscape painting has made great progress and development based on the strengthening of landscape painters' innovative awareness of creative techniques. On the one hand, they have borrowed the expressive techniques and ideas of Western painting; on the other hand, they have made use of national art and traditional culture in their works, thus giving them a new look. This paper explores the expression and development of color in contemporary landscape painting by analyzing the concept of color in contemporary landscape painting, including the unique painting style formed by some representative figures influenced by Western painting style, and then exploring more possibilities for the application of color in landscape painting.

## Keywords

Contemporary; Landscape Painting; Color Expression.

## 1. Introduction

Looking back on history, since the emergence of landscape painting on the historical stage, Chinese landscape painting has attached great importance to color, for example, lime green has always had a pivotal position in landscape painting since ancient times. During the Tang and Song dynasties, there were many outstanding painters who created a constant stream of excellent works, and at this time, the green landscape flourished and color reached a considerable height. However, since the rise of literati painting, color landscape has gradually fallen into decline, replaced by ink painting, which has taken a stable and dominant position in the painting world. For a long time, landscape painting had been dominated by black and white, from which color could only assist the slow development of ink and wash. At the end of the Qing Dynasty, due to the introduction of Western culture and unique painting techniques, landscape painters gradually created unique landscape works with their own individual characteristics, drawing on Western color styles, which gave Chinese landscape painting a new vitality. On the one hand, this vitality comes from the absorption and reference of foreign artistic concepts and expressions; on the other hand, it comes from the reinterpretation of traditions and the exploration of the sources of innovation of the national art and culture.

## 2. Contemporary Concepts of Color in Landscape Painting

### 2.1. From the Founding of the Country to the Period of Reform and Opening up

Between the founding of the state and the period of reform and opening up, landscape painters made innovative explorations of the fusion of Chinese and Western painting based on the then widespread Western concept of color, and the painters' ideology changed as they began to emphasize life drawing activities and the realistic nature of their pictures. After being exposed to the colors and forms of Western painting and drawing on them, the painters' approach to

color expression and the mood of the picture changed, whether they were depicting famous mountains and rivers or glorifying revolutionary landscape painting themes.

Under the influence of the politics of the time, the subject matter of Chinese painting gradually drew closer to the real life of the people. During this period, life drawing activities began to be promoted by painters, and the subject matter of landscape painting was no longer limited to the eulogy of scenic beauty, but began to depict the daily life of the Chinese people and was closely linked to real life. The paintings appeared in line with the characteristics of the time, thus reflecting the aesthetic changes to a certain extent. During the period of the Cultural Revolution, painters were more interested in serving politics in the subjects and images of their works, and the creative mode of "red, light and bright" appeared in more and more works.

In summary, from the founding of the People's Republic of China to before the reform and opening up, color was mainly expressed as realistic color emphasizing natural realism and subjective color emphasizing the expression of subjective color and the imaginative use of color.

## **2.2. After the Reform and Opening up**

After the reform and opening up, under the form of the great emancipation of the mind, painters' ideology and color concepts were diversified. Painters' innovation in landscape painting prevailed for a while, and highlighted their own personal style and unique charm in their pictures. In terms of color expression, painters no longer pursued realistic color style, but tended to express their own feelings in the picture, tended to highlight the formal beauty of their works, and incorporated the color expression form of Western painting into their own works. At this time, the colors in the painter's works not only include the objective expression of reality, but also carry the painter's own strong subjective consciousness.

## **3. The Influence of Life Drawing on the Color of Landscape Painting**

Landscape painting sketching has to some extent changed the status of color in landscape painting, liberating the concept of color from the confinement of its subordinate position in the picture, and its form of color expression has been greatly changed by its influence.

In the 1950s, landscape painters embarked on a variety of life drawing activities, in which they felt nature, perceived nature, and tried to explore new ways of using color in landscape painting and expand the language of landscape painting. For example, Shi Lu of the Chang'an School pioneered the new use of Loess Plateau subjects in landscape painting; Li Keran and others made outstanding contributions to the expression of light and shadow in landscape painting; Li Xiongcai and Guan Shanyue of the Lingnan School inherited the characteristics of Japanese painting style and maintained a high degree of enthusiasm for reflecting real-life subjects in landscape painting. Contemporary landscape painters are even more refined in their expression of color. They are good at combining realistic color with subjective intentional color, which not only strengthens the visual impact of color, but also broadens the expression of color in landscape painting.

## **4. The Development of Color Expression in Contemporary Landscape Painting**

### **4.1. The Change of Color in Green Landscape Painting**

Green color is an important form of expression in Chinese landscape painting and an ancient color paradigm. Excellent painters who made outstanding contributions to the color scheme have appeared in various dynasties, such as Zhan Ziqian in the Sui Dynasty, General Li in the Tang Dynasty, Wang Ximeng and the Zhao brothers in the Song Dynasty, Zhao Mengfu in the Yuan Dynasty, Wen Zhengming in the Ming Dynasty, and Huang Binhong in the modern era.

The main techniques of traditional green landscape painting are the boneless painting method and the line filling method, the latter is very decorative but mainly based on flat staining, but in terms of expression, the traditional green landscape painting has a large limitation due to the lack of variety of Chinese painting pigments. Therefore, the choice and innovation of pigment has become one of the breakthroughs to break through the single color and expression form of traditional green landscape painting. Contemporary landscape painters have explored the intersection of color and ink as well as the characteristics of Western painting, and have continued to explore new expressive languages in their practice.

#### **4.2. The Development of Splash Painting Method**

The effect of splash painting is based on the splash ink method, which is a form of painting without bones that draws on the expression of Western painting. Its effect is mainly expressed in the use of water as a medium, using ink to add color and expressing mountain and river scenery through the expression of large color blocks, thus expressing the majesty of mountain and river scenery. After the emergence of contemporary splash color landscape, it has developed greatly within a short period of time, and Zhang Daqian is one of those who have made great contributions. After Zhang Daqian, a large number of landscape painters emerged who made outstanding contributions to splash landscape, such as Liu Haisu, Zhu Qizhan, Xie Zhiliu, He Haixia, Song Wenzhi, Jia Youfu and so on. They all have their own unique styles, but all of them can skillfully use the technique of splashing color to express the picture they want.

Zhang Daqian's colorful landscape paintings are harmonious and unobtrusive, using green ink and wash as the base, and first splashing ink and then color, presenting a variegated picture effect and showing a gorgeous color scheme. The use of color is as easy as ink and water. In his works, one can always feel the fantasy of the realm and the beautiful sense of rhythm. His "Evening Landscape" breaks through the traditional color pigment system by choosing heavy mineral colors, which are difficult to melt into the paper and easily float on the surface of the picture, thus giving it a sense of volume and weight. This painting method breaks through the traditional way of color expression and replaces the traditional way of color expression such as rendering with bold color splashing, giving people a sense of opening and closing with a sense of great weather.

Liu Haisu is good at painting on raw paper with splashes of color and mainly takes Mount Huangshan as his subject matter. His works reflect the importance of "bone method of brushwork" in splash landscape painting, and he combines ink and color through his unique style of strong brushwork to express a strong and gorgeous style of painting. The surface colors of his paintings seem to be rough and random, but in fact he has a strong command of colors and a rigorous painting style, so the effect is majestic and atmospheric, which also reflects the painter's profound painting skills and rich inner world from the other side.

In addition to the works of these landscape painters, many contemporary painters nowadays incorporate the technique of splashing colors more or less naturally into their works. When creating landscape paintings, painters use the splash technique in a varied way according to their own needs to meet their artistic philosophy, and the ink and color are blended and reflected in the picture in a varied way, making today's landscape painting progress in color expression.

#### **4.3. Influenced by the Colors of Western Modern Painting**

After the 1980s, many painters drew on the characteristics of Western painting schools to create highly innovative landscape paintings. In Western modern paintings, unlike traditional Chinese painters, Western painters are accustomed to express their inner subjective feelings through color. For example, Van Gogh is one of the most representative figures of Western modern painting, his pictures have high color purity and the colors in his pictures are vastly

different from real life, all of which originate from his inner subjective feelings. This shows that in the paintings of the Western Modern School, color can effectively express the painter's subjective emotions. Therefore, after "taking the essence and removing the dross" of Western modern painting, the abstract ink and wash advocated by Wu Guanzhong, Liu Guosong and others emerged. There are Lin Fengmian, Zhu Zhengeng and others who borrowed the concepts and techniques of Western expressionism to transform traditional ink painting, and Lu Yusun and others who borrowed Western composition.

Wu Guanzhong's ink and wash works draw on Western color contrasts and are drawn from the water and mountains of Jiangnan, and he boldly adds yellow, green, and red to his images in a way that other painters do not. Wu Guanzhong's expression of color, while incorporating Western abstraction, is also full of Chinese charm, with the colors of the picture completely departing from the traditional color technique of green landscape painting, yet still allowing people to feel the vitality of the picture.

In Lu Yusun's work, he places great emphasis on the use of color in his landscape paintings and has a unique color style, especially the way he uses large areas of pure color to render the picture, which not only enhances the unity of the picture, but also reflects the realm of unity between heaven and man. He is good at using saturated colors such as big red, green and blue to deepen the landscape mood, which absorbs some of the expressions of Western painting and implants a sense of airiness and transparency that is not found in traditional green landscape painting.

#### 4.4. Color Reference to Traditional Folk Painting

Traditional Chinese folk paintings are mainly created by the working people according to their daily life and different regional cultural characteristics, and the contents of the paintings are often related to folk customs, regional characteristics and traditional culture. The visual impression is pure, bright and exaggerated.

Chinese folk New Year paintings have a catchphrase: "Red should be red and fresh, green should be green and delicate". Therefore, folk New Year paintings are warm and bright in form and concise and bright in color, mostly in the form of single color flat painting, for example, the main colors of Chinese New Year paintings are red, yellow, green, purple, black and blue. In the Chang'an School of painting, with Luo Pingan as the leading figure, Luo Pingan's painting "Partial Landscape" is innovative in taking the northwest countryside as its subject matter, drawing on the traditional folk coloring habits of New Year paintings to depict the land and crops of the countryside. The colors are as vivid and tense as those of the New Year paintings, with strong contrasts of warm and cold and complementary colors in the picture, and this strong and rhythmic distribution of colors in the picture gives a strong visual impact based on the strong color contrast. With the color expression of Chinese folk paintings, the barren northwest landscape is given a warm life.

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