

# A Study of the Ethnicity of Chinese Oil Painting

Gao Zixuan

*Department of Oil Painting, Hebei Normal University, Shijiazhuang, China*

**Abstract:** *The oil painting has been developed in China for over a hundred years since its introduction and has gone through many stages in the process, slowly moving from copying to creation to innovation, gradually realizing a Chinese and nationalized expression. The spread and development of oil painting in China have enabled the fusion of Western and Chinese cultures, not only making China's own national painting wonderful but also showing the world more innovations in oil painting, in the process forming the characteristics of the nation in terms of subject matter, expression forms and so on, which can reflect the nationality and national spirit. The aim of this article is to analyze and elaborate on the history of oil painting nationality, the construction of nationality, and the dissemination of oil painting nationality.*

**Keywords:** *oil painting nationality; construction; historical evolution; dissemination*

## 1. Introduction

Culture is the cornerstone and core of art creation, and art creation with cultural heritage is more vivid and infectious. In the development of oil painting, ethnicity is not negligible and is extremely important, and in the end, it is actually through various national characteristics that the national image is constructed. If there is no ethnicity, then the ethnic image is untenable. In the development of oil painting, from the simple copying of outstanding foreign works at the beginning to the creation of works using oil painting techniques, oil painting has developed over a long period of time, because of the influence of inherent ideas and foreign techniques, many works do not have the characteristic features of the nation. In recent years, through the continuous development of oil painting, painters have begun to attach importance to nationality. While Chinese oil painting is under the influence of Western art, it is also subconsciously and selectively absorbing its essence and integrating the cultural heritage of its own nation. Art is national in nature, and most of the artistic creation is based on one's own life and the wider environment and is a true reflection of the nation. Different countries, different beliefs, and different periods create different oil paintings, which is also due to the influence of national differences. Chinese oil paintings should reflect the connotation and spirit of the Chinese nation, but not deliberately fused and imitated, with emphasis on culture and spirit rather than a technical approach.

## 2. A historical study of the ethnicity of oil painting

### 2.1. The introduction of oil painting

Oil painting was introduced to China in the 16th century with the arrival of the missionaries, which was the first time people came into contact with Western painting, which was very different from traditional Chinese painting and has a history of over a hundred years.

From the perspective of the oil paintings themselves, they have evolved from the initial depiction of the external features of the characters to a more in-depth portrayal and expression of the characteristics of the times in which they live, their spirituality and psychological traits, achieving a sublimation and leap in the spiritual dimension of oil painting. This evolutionary process has also provided plenty of feasible references and borrowing for the creative practice of oil painting, making the oil painting figure more connotative in terms of shaping and richer in emotional expression. It makes the art very meaningful as a special text for recording the development of human history.

### 2.2. The development of oil painting in China

Oil painting was introduced to China from the West to a certain extent. As soon as it was introduced

to China, many people began to study oil painting, learning the colors, techniques, steps, and subject matter of the West, etc. The works of art in foreign countries, no matter what period they were in, reflected the local customs and characteristics of the time. Chinese oil painters have gone through a long process of reflection from the historical level to the artistic level, proposing the 'nationalization of oil painting', which has led to a more diversified and personalized approach to Chinese oil painting. The development of art is also a long and enriching process of slowly exploring and learning from experience. It has gradually become an important part of Chinese culture. Although oil painting was introduced from abroad, Chinese artists have learned the techniques through continuous exploration and study, thus starting their creative innovation and giving Chinese oil painting a better future.

### ***2.3. The Formation of Chinese Oil Painting Ethnicity***

The Chinese nation has a long history of profound cultural heritage, which is incomparable to that of other countries.

"Oil painting nationality is not only a reflection of the unique cognitive ability and aesthetic psychology of the members of a national society but can also enhance national consciousness and national identity and maintain the diversity of the world's national cultures." [1] As a foreign Western art form, Chinese oil painters have, after a long period of historical reflection, put forward artistic reflections on the ethnicity of oil painting, promoting a more diverse and personalized Chinese oil painting. When it comes to ethnicity in oil painting, one should not simply list traditional elements and put them together to fit the theme, nor should one use the materials of oil painting to paint Chinese paintings, but should refine them from the culture of the Chinese nation and raise them to a spiritual embodiment. "Oil painting ethnicity should be able to reflect a deep understanding and identification with national culture in the work. China's culture is vast and profound, and traditional cultural knowledge and traditional painting ideas can provide valuable ideas for artists, and it is also these cultures that support the development of oil painting ethnicity." [2] If the paintings painted by Chinese oil painters do not show Chinese characteristics to the admirers or are still mistaken for works from other countries, then they should learn more about traditional culture and form their own style. The most important thing in this process is to broaden one's horizons while not forgetting to enrich oneself, and to take into account Chinese culture when learning Western techniques so that Chinese oil painting can go further and better, which is a long-term plan. This is a long-term plan that needs to be completed together.

## **3. The Construction of Ethnicity in Chinese Oil Painting**

### ***3.1. The use of traditional culture in oil painting***

China has a long history and there are many traditional cultures that we need to discover and learn from. There is much to learn from our national folk culture and many foreign designs and paintings also refer to our traditional graphic styles, being in China has more facilities and a deeper understanding of various cultures, we should pay attention to learning traditional culture, which is the most valuable assets of our nation. The integration of traditional culture into oil painting allows our country's culture to be better carried forward. The ethnicity of art is not just a subject matter or a form to show, it is based on traditional culture, supplemented by what the artist has seen and heard in his environment and then created with different techniques. The content of traditional culture must be portrayed with thought and emotion rather than simply piling up elements so that others can see the connotation and spirit of traditional culture through the surface. The key to using Chinese traditional culture well lies in whether you have a sense of belonging, identity, and pride in the nation, and whether you can study traditional culture with a sense of reverence. If Chinese oil painters can master the concepts and techniques of Western oil painting while also being able to build on traditional culture, then the content created will be vivid and interesting, enabling people to empathize with them, and the artist's creativity will be able to flourish.

### ***3.2. Theoretical Construction of Ethnicity***

The current national theoretical knowledge system is not perfect, Chinese oil painting theory needs to pay attention to the summary of Chinese oil painting art experience, and these experience summaries in the form of written records, any excellent works need to have a strong theory as support, theoretical knowledge system is the foundation of art, without the support of theory as art is like an empty shell,

not solid enough, theory and practice to create Only by linking theory with practice can we create excellent works of art that can stand up to scrutiny. There are various problems in the development of ethnicity with oil painting, and these lessons need to be constantly reflected upon and summarised so that a good and perfect theoretical system can be formed more quickly.

### ***3.3. Challenges and Opportunities for the Ethnicity of Chinese Oil Painting***

On the road to the nationality of Chinese oil painting, we are still developing and feeling our way and will encounter various challenges, including theory, technique, cultural learning, and ideological change, but if we play it safe we will be able to turn these challenges into opportunities. Some artists are still bent on learning Western art, ignoring the important factor of our culture. We should reduce our bent on chasing foreign oil paintings and start more from traditional Chinese art in order to make oil painting nationalize better. One should establish cultural self-confidence, have a strong sense of responsibility towards society, and be confident and proud of national culture. "Ethnicity is a kind of national spirit, temperament, national style, and the strong symbols and visual characteristics of national traditional forms, it is more stable and a symbol of history." [2] Ethnicity has existed since the beginning of the nation, it has been progressing and rising with the continuous development and integration of the nation, so when using some ethnic elements it is important to pay attention to the back and forth, today's development and integration, only in this way can we create excellent works with a contemporary character. There are now many artists in China who have their own style of thinking and characteristics, but they still need to learn to improve and progress.

## **4. The spread of ethnicity in oil painting**

### ***4.1. Selecting national cultural content that the population is willing to accept***

"The construction of ethnic images in oil paintings is mainly a reasonable application of various elements of ethnic culture and a vivid embodiment of the national spirit. To achieve ethnicity, one needs to have an in-depth understanding of ethnic culture and be able to use it flexibly in the picture." [3] In the creation, it can be considered from several aspects, the first aspect is to choose the right ethnic culture, the Chinese nation's ethnic culture is very rich and profound, from the history and culture, language, clothing, customs, and so on have distinctive characteristics, but want to select from it the suitable people are willing to accept the ethnic culture is difficult, is required to think carefully. For example, the distinctive decorations of the nation, the distinctive national festivals and customs, the distinctive climate of the region, the special spirituality, and so on, are all common choices made by the creators of oil paintings. No matter how they are chosen, ethnic cultural elements are necessary for the creation of ethnic oil paintings, and only in this way can the ethnicity of ethnic oil paintings be realized; there are many ways in which ethnic cultural elements can be reflected in oil paintings, which can give the artist ample space to play, such as using color, composition, subject matter, customs and so on, which can be very distinct or very subtle. The second aspect is the value of national cultural content. Oil painting is a more widely spread art form, which has a special educational, aesthetic, cognitive, and inspirational function. The work can also inspire people's imagination. The realization of these functions is conducive to the expression and perspective of the content of the oil painting, and more importantly, the value and significance of the ethnic and cultural content. Aesthetics is very important and indispensable in art, and one of the basic attributes of oil painting is aesthetics. The other important issue is the aesthetic quality of the content itself.

### ***4.2. Representation of cultural content in a way that is pleasing to the people***

"A fundamental feature of oil painting is its extremely expressive and technical effect. Oil paintings often have rich color variations, together with thick and transparent layers of contrast, and endlessly varied brushwork, and have become a relatively popular art of painting." [3] There are various ways of expressing oil painting, but the audience, which often perceives and understands oil paintings according to its own intellectual experience and aesthetic standards, does not accept all ways of expressing oil painting. Nowadays the public's aesthetic does not understand some professional art techniques and ways of presentation, so they choose to paint in a more distinct and understandable way as far as possible. Such works are more acceptable and loved by the public, and can better spread ethnic oil painting. What is depicted in the oil painting is the presentation of life, and the oil painting scene is composed of many different elements of culture, whether it is the composition of the relationship

between the characters and the background environment, or the composition of the objects and the environment, when they are presented together they form the structural relationship of the composition of the picture, the admirer is not only appreciative of the subject matter and the shaping of the picture but is also influenced by the structure of the picture, only a more harmonious structural composition processing can Only a more harmonious structural composition can be accepted and liked by the public. Therefore, ethnic oil paintings should also pay attention to the preferences of the audience in terms of picture structure and should use symmetry, center, and other structural techniques that are acceptable to the audience for the composition of the picture.

#### ***4.3. Innovation of ethnic and cultural elements***

Different interpretations of selected ethnic and cultural elements will lead to different conclusions. After getting used to the conventional perspective, the search for new and different becomes a basic feature of the public's artistic needs, and this feature is also a condition for the public's recognition of oil painting and the spread of ethnic oil painting. Ethnic oil painting requires innovation, not just copying traditional culture, but planning and screening by the artists themselves, and then further combining them with their own creative ideas to innovate. For the viewer, the same old paintings with the same thematic perspective will slowly become visually fatiguing, and thus make people less interested in the paintings. In terms of oil painting itself, innovation is a necessity in every era and at every stage. Only through constant overthrow and innovation can better and richer oil paintings emerge, which is also driving the development of oil painting forward. Artist creators, must be bold enough to try to innovate in the area, find their own personal style and form the characteristics of their own works, so that they can have a longer-term development.

"Both in terms of the development and dissemination of oil painting, innovation is a basic requirement for the creation of nationalistic oil painting. It is not only limited to the innovation of creation methods, but also the integration and innovation of cultural materials. Taking ethnic cultural elements as creation materials is the basic condition for ethnic oil paintings to ensure ethnicity, and ethnic minority cultural elements rich in ethnicity are mostly reflected in various literary works, such as the Mongolian yurt and the Miao ethnic costumes." [3]The use of these elements can always be seen in various works of art, and although this strengthens the representation of ethnicity in the relevant elements, it also causes aesthetic fatigue among the public towards the various ethnic elements, and this aesthetic fatigue will also affect the spread of ethnic oil paintings. Although there is a great deal of ethnicity in these paintings, it is easy for them to appear similar, leaving the viewer uninterested in the content. In 1985, when many painters gathered at Huangshan Mountain to discuss the future development of Chinese oil painting, Wu Guanzhong proposed that the development of Chinese oil painting should be "kite without a string", that is, while creating freely, we should be rooted in the people and create art that belongs to them. For a long time, we have been focusing on the west, where the nationalities have more obvious ethnic and regional characteristics, and many artists like to portray the landscapes and people of the west, but there are fifty-six nationalities in China, and there are many traditional customs and many valuable spirits. In order to show the spirit of the nation better. The creator of oil paintings should have a sense of national pride, which is partly in the blood, but also in the knowledge and history of the nation, to build up a sense of identity with the nation, to integrate the nationality into the creation, and to give the work its own vitality and vigor. Therefore, in the construction of national cultural images in oil painting, we must also make our own interpretation and innovation of national culture, and form a new interpretation of national cultural elements in oil painting from a different perspective, so that the appreciators can have new feelings about national cultural elements in oil paintings.

#### **5. Conclusion**

The ethnicity of Chinese oil painting has its irresistible artistic charm. It combines traditional Chinese cultural thought and Western oil painting techniques and contains the wisdom and innovation of Chinese artists, not only enriching the art and culture of the nation but also widening the path of development of oil painting in the world and securing a place for Chinese oil painting in the world. The ethnicity of Chinese oil painting is very important, as it can show the long cultural heritage of China, reflect the characteristics of our country, and reflect the spiritual outlook of our country. The ethnicity of Chinese oil painting should be vigorously developed, prompting artists to find their path, innovate on national culture, and give Chinese oil painting a dazzling glow. The development of art is endless and endless, and the development of art needs to rely on the hard work of every artist. In the face of

today's world, for a Chinese oil painting to be integrated into the world trend, we must be based on the nation, learn the traditional culture, experience the profound connotation, and actively study the fundamentals of art, so that Chinese oil painting can make greater progress and development. Now that we are in the midst of development, the country has given us a good space for us to showcase ourselves, and we should seize every opportunity to work hard and keep up with the times so that Chinese oil painting can stand in the world of art. We should take a longer-term view, not just focusing on our culture, but also on the traditional Chinese culture, experiencing the connotations of Chinese spiritual culture, not staying on the surface, conducting in-depth exploration and research, exploring our culture while also looking at the world, understanding the latest information, techniques, theories, and paintings, keeping up with the times, not burying our heads in the sand and being closed off to information, painters should distill from their studies the ideas and thoughts belonging to We must respect and value the traditional Chinese culture and promote a newer and better development of oil painting. In today's world, there are many Chinese painters with high achievements in the international arena so that Chinese oil paintings can be seen by more people so that more people can understand the connotation and essence of Chinese culture and promote Chinese culture to the center of the world stage. There is a spiritual dimension and a technical dimension to art creation, both of which are indispensable, especially as the former plays a decisive role. The artist's mind must be kept awake, based on his roots, and study in depth the various philosophies of a painting of the ancients, to have a thoughtful painting, to let more people understand the traditional Chinese culture and our spiritual connotations, and to let Chinese oil painting have a better development.

## References

- [1] Tong Xiaofeng. *A Brief Discussion on the Ethnicity of Chinese Oil Painting and its Development* [J]. *Art Education Research*, 2012 (05):21.
- [2] Sun Hongde. *The Construction of Ethnicity in Contemporary Chinese Oil Painting* [J]. *Beauty and Times (in)*, 2018(02):63-64.
- [3] Li Na. *Ethnicity and communication: Reflections on the construction of national cultural image based on oil painting creation* [J]. *Sichuan Theatre*, 2020(08):49-51.