

PROCEEDINGS ARTICLE

Analysis on Art-Geography Science of Chinese Watercolor Painting Styles

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ABSTRACT

Chinese watercolor paintings are the product of the localization and nationalization of Western painting. In terms of geospatial dimension, Chinese watercolor paintings show a kind of art-geography science characteristic of Chinese humanistic atmosphere. The natural environment such as mountains, rivers, rocks, and vegetation in China not only exist as objects depicted by watercolor paintings, but also give birth to watercolor culture of different regions and watercolor painting creation groups, showing the artistic tension of regional space in Chinese watercolor paintings. From the perspective of art-geography science, injecting more humanistic factors into watercolor art creation not only expands the diversified development paths of Chinese watercolor, but also establishes the cultural status and national identity of Chinese watercolor paintings in world art.

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1. INTRODUCTION

"Style" is a concept with specific temporal and spatial meaning. As far as the style of watercolor painting is concerned, the cultural significance and artistic style extended in the spatial dimension are obviously regional and national. Although people have done extensive and in-depth research on Chinese watercolor painting in terms of form, style, content, technique and materials, there are not many that examine Chinese watercolor paintings from the perspective of art-geography science. So-called "art-geography science" is a recent humanities field that combines art and geography, aiming to explore the essence and characteristics of art culture with help of the regionality of human geographical environment.

As far as the scope is concerned, the geographical environment is the objective condition for human survival, including the natural and human geographical environment, which plays a vital role in the survival and development of human beings. Tao Shihu, deputy director of the Watercolor Art Committee of the Chinese Artists Association, pointed out: "The regional environment and the personality of

the regional culture have created the convergence of the painter groups in terms of creative content, aesthetic concepts, and expression techniques, forming the local characteristics of contemporary Chinese watercolor painting". In the 18th century, the French thinker Montesquieu (1689-1755) made a positive judgment on the role of geographical environmental factors in the development of human society according to the differences in the field conditions in Northern Europe and Southern Europe after an investigation in Europe. He believed that the geographical environment, especially the climate, latitude, the fertile or barren soil, and the vastness of the territory, would have a decisive influence on a nation's character, temperament, spiritual outlook, laws, regulations, and political systems. His "determinism of geographical environment" had a direct impact on the formation of the view of the French art historian Hippolyte-Adolphe Taine (1828-1893) that the formation and appearance of art depended on three factors [1]: race, environment (including region) and era. In fact, after the watercolor painting was introduced to China as a "Western painting", it has gradually been "Sinicized" in the course of a century of development and

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presented in the world of watercolor painting in a different "Chinese watercolor" style. Since the 1980s, Chinese watercolor painting has developed in a diversified direction and local groups and regional styles have gradually formed in the creation activities [2]. In the past, most research on Chinese watercolor paintings focused on the origin and inheritance from the time dimension, but not enough attention was paid to the geographical (horizontal dimension) factors affecting its development. Therefore, the application of the methods of art-geography science to the study of Chinese watercolor paintings has considerable practical significance for the relatively young painting genre of watercolor painting.

As far as methodology is concerned, this paper intends to use the research method of art-geography science [3] to explore its influence on the differences between southern and northern regions of Chinese watercolor painting from the two aspects of natural and humanistic environment in order to explore the coupling effect of human geography factors involved in the creation of Chinese watercolor art.

2. INFLUENCE OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT ON THE THEMES AND TECHNIQUES OF CHINESE WATERCOLOR PAINTINGS

Artistic creation is inseparable from the natural environment and the natural environment has also changed and adapted to the artist's technical performance accordingly. The natural environment is a complex system composed of the interaction, mutual restriction and mutual transformation of the lithosphere, atmosphere, hydrosphere and biosphere on the earth's surface [4], such as oceans, mountains, vegetation, and wind, rain, thunder and lightning and other factors. Lao Zi proposed: "Man models himself after the Earth, the Earth models itself after Heaven, the Heaven models itself after Tao, and Tao models itself after nature". "Tao models itself after nature" is the ultimate choice for human beings to explore the natural environment and adapt to its laws in the process of evolution. Geographically, the geographical location and scope of northern China generally include the Great Khingan, the Helan Mountains, the east of the Bayan Har Mountains, and the north of the Qinling Mountains and the Huaihe River. The southern China mainly refers to the south of the Qinling Mountains and the Huaihe River, with the East China Sea to the east and the South China Sea to the south. The natural environment has a profound

influence on painting and traditional Chinese painting has long been divided into northern and southern schools. Watercolor painting originated in Germany but flourished in Britain. To explore the reasons, the oceanic climate has caused the air to be humid, which has created the possibility of the prosperity of British watercolor painting from the natural environment. And "water", a substance that is recycled in nature, as a medium for watercolor toning, has an extremely subtle naturalness in itself. Therefore, the natural environment can not only become the object of watercolor painting, but also affect the formation of watercolor painting style.

First of all, the mountains, rivers, rocks, and vegetation in the natural environment become the performance objects of watercolor paintings, which will obviously have the most direct impact on the appearance of their paintings. The performance object of watercolor painting is good at landscape and the creator has always attached great importance to outdoor sketching. As the performance object of watercolor painting, from the miniature paintings of ancient Egypt to the terrain paintings of the British colonial era, from terrain paintings to watercolor landscape paintings in the true sense, and then to modern watercolor paintings, all of them have maintained a close relationship with the natural environment. The travel boom in Britain in the 18th century promoted the gradual evolution of the subject matter of watercolor painting from terrain painting to landscape painting, and made it a unique and charming art category. As far as China is concerned, the northern region has formed its unique geographical features due to the influence of the natural environment, with rich forests, vast grasslands and boundless deserts. At the same time, dry climatic conditions and strong wind erosion have become important external forces for the formation of Yardang, Gobi and desert landforms. Furthermore, due to the relatively high altitude and latitude, the frost season in winter is longer, forming northern characteristics. The plains and hills in the southern region are vast. Due to the warm and humid climate, most of the mountainous and hilly areas have rich and vegetation, and the vegetation forms a luxuriant and green scene. In addition, the water system is developed, the rivers are crisscrossed, and the lakes are dotted, which is very different from the northern environment. The difference in the natural environment between the south and the north has resulted in the vast differences in the geography and landforms of China, and the differences in natural scenery and landforms are also most intuitively presented in the picture. This kind of difference is

first reflected in the visual aspect and then reflected in the materials used in the creation of watercolor paintings. For example, the watercolor paintings in the northeast are mostly based on the white mountain and black water; the watercolor paintings in Inner Mongolia mostly show the prairie charm; the painters in the northwest region are fond of the plateau and the Gobi; the painters in the coastal areas are better at depicting the seascape.

In addition, the geographical environment doesn't only exist as an object depicted in watercolor paintings. The geographical differences between the north and the south have resulted in warm and humid climate conditions in the south and windy and dry conditions in the north, thus determining the north-south difference in air humidity. Since "water" is the toning medium of watercolor paintings, changes in humidity conditions have become the key to affecting the appearance of watercolor paintings. The use of "water" directly runs through the whole process of watercolor paintings. Watercolor painting is painting on watercolor paper after using water-tone paints. Unlike rice paper in Chinese painting, watercolor painting paper requires moderate water absorption, and wet pigments can flow on the substrate for a period of time. The dryness and humidity of the painting environment not only directly determines the drying time of the color on the substrate and reflects the effect of precipitation, infiltration and dyeing in the picture, but even due to the different drying time, the color will also present different texture and quality. The painter's control of water plays a crucial role in the texture and heaviness of the objective image. More precisely, the organic combination and application of water and color techniques is the key to the overall survival of the work [5]. The main technique used by watercolorists in the south is wet painting. Professor Liu Shouxiang said when he taught his creative experience in the national excellent teaching course "Watercolor Painting Creation" of Hubei Institute of Fine Arts that after soaking 300 grams of watercolor paper and laying it on the plastic board, you can do wet painting for 4 to 5 hours and complete the whole process of creation before the substrate is completely dry. This creative method has to rely on the humidity of the local air. It can be seen that the local humid climate in Hubei directly affects the effect of the picture. Compared with the high humidity in the south, in the dry air environment in the north, painters generally use the combination of dry and wet techniques to create. In some extreme dry climate environment in Xinjiang, there are even more "dense water and thick colors" and "color matching" painting methods to

solve the problem of the expressiveness of watercolor ontology language in a dry environment.

The difference in air humidity between the north and the south not only plays a role in the application of watercolor painting techniques, but also causes the difference in the creator's visual experience between the air humidity in the south and the north. The northern region has high altitude, strong sunlight, and long sunshine time, and the average temperature difference between day and year is large, so it has four distinct seasons, just as the sunshine in Arles, France created Van Gogh. People who live in high-intensity sunlight areas for a long time will naturally have a stronger cognition of surrounding objects. While in the south, the air is warm and humid due to the relatively high temperature and rain. Cloudy and overcast weather causes sunlight to scatter, making objective images appear blurry. This visual difference has been around for a long time. The strong sunlight in the northern region and the water mist environment in the southern region must be reflected in the creations of the watercolorists living there, and then present differences in the painting elements. To better demonstrate this difference, two works of art are taken as examples, as shown in Table 1.

The two watercolor works in Table 1 depict the landscapes of Northeast China and Hunan respectively and they both adopt a realistic approach. Excluding the difference in subject matter, the differences in the expression of light, color, outline and other painting elements between the two works can be seen. "Sunshine in Early Spring" depicts a common henhouse in the northeastern countryside. The object is meticulously portrayed, and the picture is full of light and warm tones. "Morning Fog in Western Hunan" depicts the scenery of rural Hunan. The picture is warm and quiet, shrouded in thick water vapor. The two works present completely different picture effect, conveying different feelings to people, which is not unrelated to the influence of the natural environment in the area. In northern China, there is sufficient sunshine, four distinct seasons, and short precipitation, so the air is dry and the transparency is high and the objective images give people a strong sense of shape. In the Jiangnan region, due to the large annual average precipitation, the moisture content in the air is high, and rainy and foggy weather is common, forming a hazy visual sense of objects. The humidity of the air will directly affect its transparency, which will result in a strong difference in the texture of the painting in the creation. The color objectively presented in the natural environment has aroused the creator's

subjective color inspiration with personal emotions, and the painting colors with their own characteristics are displayed in different expression languages. The transparent and strong sunlight in the northern region makes the color saturation and purity of natural objects show a higher tendency. In the south, the picture is relatively soft, color contrast and purity are low, and the picture presents a harmonious tone.

While paying attention to conventional visual factors such as light and color, the blending of water and colors in watercolor painting brings the outlines of objects depicted in the works, which explain the profound in simple terms. Different climatic conditions will be reflected in the use of water during the creation of watercolor paintings. The wet painting method is one of the most characteristic techniques of watercolor painting. It requires the blending of water and colors, and the watercolor paints must infiltrate

each other on the substrate, resulting in blurred outlines and sidelines, giving people a hazy sense of sight. This technique will be more used in the creation of watercolor paintings in the south. The dry painting method is to use watercolor paints to paint on drier paper. Since it is not bound by time, it is mostly used to shape specific objects. Northern painters generally use this technique to achieve the highlight of outlines.

Traditional Chinese painting advocates "Learning from Nature and Feeling from Heart". This instructs people to take nature as the teacher of creation, absorb the beauty of nature and combine the inner inspiration of the creator, and combine the two into one for artistic creation. Although watercolor painting is a foreign painting genre, by the above discussion, it can be seen that the influence of natural environment factors on the painting genre itself is obvious.



	Northern Region	Southern Region
Examples given		
Author / title of work	Zhao Yunlong / "Sunshine in Early Spring"	Huang Tieshan / "Morning Fog in Western Hunan"
Sense of light	Strong	Soft
Saturation / purity	High	Low
Object image outline	Highlight	Dissipate
Main watercolor techniques	Dry painting	Wet painting

Table 1. Comparison diagram of South and North China watercolor-landscape painting elements.

3. HUMANISTIC FACTORS HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE DIFFERENT SPIRITUAL CONNOTATIONS OF WATERCOLOR PAINTINGS IN THE NORTH AND THE SOUTH

Artistic works are the direct embodiment of the artist's spirit and cultural quality, and the human geographical space and culture where the artist is located are important factors that influence or interfere with artistic creation. The different humanities in the south and north of China are

another factor that contributes to the regional style of watercolor painting. The humanistic environment that acts in parallel with the natural factors is a "spiritual" climate, which plays an equally important role as the natural climate. The humanistic factors require that people "pay attention not only to the geographical space, but also to the common and similar spiritual traditions and cultural traits that remain within this geographical space" [6]. Among them, human landscape and folk customs have become the objects of watercolor painting and are also the concentrated expression of regional culture in various places, which radiate into the creation of

watercolor painting. More importantly, China's rich regional cultural resources have been subtly polished to achieve the different spiritual temperament and aesthetic orientation of southern and northern watercolorists. After trying to improve the technical control ability of watercolor art and various watercolor languages, the further prosperity and development of Chinese watercolor painting will need to be deeply integrated with Chinese culture, in which regional culture will play an important role. Only when it is truly integrated and agitated with regional culture, can there be a regional creative group in the true sense of Chinese watercolor painting [7]. There is an old saying in China: "Out of a hundred miles, the wind is different, and out of a thousand miles, the customs are different". People in different regions have different languages and folk customs, which give birth to different regional cultures. As a result, in the process of localization, watercolor is continuously combined with regional culture of various places to form local watercolor painting groups, which is reflected in convergence of choice of subject matter, aesthetic orientation and expression techniques.

In areas with distinct regional cultural characteristics, the style of watercolor painting creation is also more typical. For example, the creative groups of watercolorists in Harbin, Shenyang, Dalian, etc. in Northeast China are influenced by the realism teaching system of the former Soviet Union, attaching importance to sketching training, and their creations are dominated by realism, presenting watercolor paintings with the theme of typical local folk customs and industrial plants. In addition to the white mountain and black water, the vast regional features and the Northeast China household customs of the ravines, hills and courtyards, the honest, forthright, powerful and vigorous personalities meet and merge with each other, forming the simple, heavy, rich and delicate Northeast China creative style of northeast watercolor painting, and making the creation group there become one of the most influential groups in China [8]. Watercolor painting creators in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region have long depicted grassland nomadic culture and life. Whether it is landscape, figure or still subject matter, they all rely on grassland culture as the background. The works often show life scenes of nomadic people and use such themes to show the simple, straightforward, and hero-worshipping characters of the grassland people. "Regionalism" has become the most prominent style of watercolor art in Inner Mongolia. The Shanghai, Zhejiang, and Jiangsu areas are the birthplace of Wuyue culture and the earliest dissemination areas of Chinese watercolor paintings. The unique diversity

and openness of Shanghai makes it the birthplace of Chinese watercolor paintings. Nurtured by arbitrary and gentle Wuyue culture, the Zhejiang, Shanghai and Jiangsu areas have formed a restrained, graceful, fresh and soft regional style, forming a group of "Shanghai-style" painters with similar styles and aesthetics.

In the modern era of economic globalization, regional culture is not only an excellent cultural tradition of the Chinese nation, but also the basic premise for the survival and development of a national state. China has a vast territory and its regional culture is complex and diverse. The characteristics of each regional culture are the foundation of the development of Chinese watercolor painting. Artists with different regional cultures in the south and north have their own characteristics in spiritual temperament, thinking personality, and aesthetic habits, which have become important factors affecting the style of Chinese watercolor painting.

4. CONCLUSION

To sum up, the art of painting is an important form of culture. As a category of painting, watercolor painting is deeply influenced by its geographical environment. Chinese watercolor painting is the product of "localization" and "nationalization" of Western painting. China's diverse natural environment has caused the differences in themes and techniques of Chinese watercolor painting, while China's rich humanistic factors have contributed to the different spiritual connotations of southern and northern watercolor paintings. Geographical environment influences different groups of watercolorists in China from many aspects, making them present unique themes, aesthetic orientations and expression techniques in their creations, thus forming the "regional" artistic style of Chinese watercolor.

Therefore, differences in regions lead to differences in the painting styles of Chinese watercolor art. Against the background of today's art globalization, from the perspective of art-geography science, injecting more humanistic factors into watercolor art creation not only expands the diversified development paths of Chinese watercolor, but also establishes the cultural status and national identity of Chinese watercolor paintings in the world art.

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