

A Study on the Characteristics of the Expressive Language of Contemporary Chinese Realistic Watercolour Painting

¹Xia Quan

¹Prof., Dept. of Global Fine Art, Kyonggi Univ., Korea
1171845747@qq.com

Abstract

Watercolour painting was introduced to China over a hundred years ago, and in the last two decades, it has developed rapidly, presenting a situation of diversified development. While Western-style watercolour painting has been adopted by Chinese painters, they have also expanded on it with their own aesthetic awareness and cognitive styles. As a result, Chinese watercolour painting has developed a set of expressive techniques that highlight the cultural characteristics of the nation in terms of aesthetics, concepts and techniques, resulting in a painting style with a distinctive national personality at present. Although Chinese watercolour painting has taken on a variety of styles with the intervention of modern and contemporary art, realistic watercolour painting is still the mainstream. However, there are obvious differences between the "realism" of Chinese watercolour painting and the "realism" of Western watercolour painting in terms of expression. The most distinctive feature is the "imagery" language of expression, which is closely linked to the cultural heritage of Chinese tradition and is of great value for research. I interpret the aesthetics, composition, colour and brushwork of Chinese realistic watercolour painting from the perspective of traditional Chinese aesthetics in order to deepen the understanding of Chinese realistic watercolour painting and to provide a reference for the further development of the art of Chinese realistic watercolour painting.

Keywords: Chinese Realistic Watercolour, Imagery, The Language of Expression, Traditional Aesthetics

1. INTRODUCTION

Before Western watercolour painting became an independent genre in England, it was spreading outward through the missionaries. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, Western learning spread eastwards and watercolour painting was introduced into China. During the Kangxi period of the Qing Dynasty, the missionary Lang Shining became the court painter of the Qing Dynasty, bringing with him Western oil and watercolour paintings. Later on, Western watercolours, which had been imported through the commercial trade, flourished in Guangzhou, and Chinese painters depicted Chinese scenes and folklore in "watercolours for export", which continued for a century before being discontinued. After the Opium War, the Catholic Church opened the Shanghai Tushanwan Painting Studio in Shanghai to teach watercolour painting, and the need for educational reform in China led to the introduction of watercolour painting, thus rapidly spreading Western watercolour painting in China. After the Western watercolour painting was introduced to China, it gradually formed Chinese watercolour painting with Chinese national temperament and Chinese artistic interest, drawing on the

Manuscript received: February 22, 2023 / revised: March 10, 2023 / accepted: March 15, 2023

Corresponding Author: 1171845747@qq.com

Tel: +*** - **** - ****

Professor, Dept. of Global Fine Art, Kyonggi Univ., Korea

Copyright©2023 by The International Promotion Agency of Culture Technology. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0>)

profound and profound Chinese excellent traditional culture on Chinese soil [1]. Contemporary Chinese watercolour painting is still dominated by realistic watercolour painting, and for this reason, one has to trace the history of the development of the realistic style of Chinese watercolour painting. During the war years, the revolutionary art movement replaced the Western painting movement, strengthening the propaganda and educational functions of painting. After the founding of the state, it became the sacred duty of painters to "glorify the motherland and serve the people". Together with the spread of Soviet art experience, the promotion of revolutionary realism and the criticism of Western modern schools, the realistic style of Chinese watercolour painting developed. Since the 1950s and 1960s, both the older generation of watercolour painters and the younger generation of watercolour painters have sought to penetrate deeply into life, to understand the masses, and to use watercolour to reflect the new face of the new China. The realistic method of expression was in keeping with the needs of the time and the appreciation level of the masses. The realistic style was thus established and developed steadily, laying down the traditional mode of Chinese watercolour painting [2].

With the rapid development of the times, the language of expression has changed considerably, both in terms of creative concept and subject matter, as well as in terms of expressive techniques and technical development. Unlike the objective reproduction of objects in the past, contemporary Chinese watercolour painters pay more attention to the expression of subjective spiritual connotations, presenting the aesthetic characteristics of "realism" in their watercolour works, reflecting the unique aesthetic taste of the Chinese people and their cognition and reflection on the world. While Western-style watercolour painting has been adopted by Chinese painters, they have also expanded it with their aesthetic consciousness and cognitive approach. The watercolour painters are particularly influenced by traditional Chinese painting, and their connotation of "art" is in tune with the traditional aesthetic idea of "the unity of heaven and man", giving their works an ethereal and elegant poetic quality; while their "technique" Their ability to master the interrelationship between water, colour, brush and paper, derived from Chinese painting techniques, gives them an innate advantage in the process of painting their works. After a hundred years of absorption and digestion by several generations, Chinese watercolour painting has gradually freed itself from the constraints of Westerners in various aspects such as aesthetics, concepts and techniques, and has formed a whole set of expressive means that highlight the characteristics of its own culture, creating a style of painting that is now distinct from the Western style of watercolour painting and has a distinct national personality [3].

Although Chinese watercolour painting has been blossoming with the intervention of modern and contemporary art, realistic watercolour painting is still the mainstream, yet there are obvious differences between Chinese realistic watercolour painting and Western realistic watercolour painting in terms of expressive language. Most of the existing studies on Chinese realistic watercolour painting have focused only on its techniques, materials and pictorial language, but have neglected the most distinctive feature of Chinese realistic watercolour painting that distinguishes it from the West, namely its "imagery" expressive language. Most of the existing studies on the language of expression are general in nature or are only a superficial elaboration of one of the elements in the text, lacking in research depth. The further development of Chinese watercolour is inseparable from its cultural soil and an in-depth study of traditional aesthetic thought. At present, domestic research on the expressive language of Chinese realistic watercolour is mainly focused on materials, techniques and creative approaches, mainly analysing and elaborating on the exploration of watercolour painting materials and texture expression. For example, in his article 'An Exploration of the Realistic Language of Contemporary Watercolour Painting', Niu Jie points out that traditional watercolour painting itself has its limitations, and that in the process of contemporary figurative research, painters have introduced a variety of materials in an attempt to achieve innovation in the way they express themselves. The innovation of painting tools and materials has changed the lightness and thinness of watercolour painting, making the picture more cohesive and the colours more saturated and thick, and changing the limitations of

watercolour painting which becomes grey and dirty when superimposed many times [4]. In her study on the creation and expression of contemporary realistic watercolour artworks, Julia Yu proposes that the use of multiple media creates a sense of heaviness in the picture, forming a variety of visual textures. The texture is the basic form of visual language, the surface characteristics of the object, and has the same emotional traits as the colour lines, both tactile and visual. After analysing the relevant works, it is concluded that contemporary Chinese watercolour paintings of figures have both realistic reproduction of these artistic characteristics and the use of a variety of materials and media, with a variety of techniques and textures, incorporating modern artistic representations, beginning to focus more on the art itself, emphasising innovation in form while at the same time defining the subject position of the painter in the picture, promoting and advocating artistic individuality, creating expressions of more human The art of painting is a nationalised art [5]. Although the language of contemporary Chinese realistic watercolour painting has been briefly mentioned in these discussions as a combination with traditional culture, highlighting the characteristics of nationalisation. However, what exactly this nationalized character of the expressive language is and how it relates to traditional Chinese culture is not elaborated upon and therefore not yet clear. In addition, studies that only stay at the level of material and technical expression lack depth, making it difficult to conduct an in-depth study of the expressive language characteristics of contemporary Chinese realistic watercolour painting. Based on this, in this study, I adopt a speculative research method under the perspective of traditional Chinese aesthetics to conduct a profound cognitive interpretation of the "imagery" expressive language characteristics of Chinese realistic watercolour painting, and to investigate the origin of such expressive language characteristics, in order to make up for the lack of depth in the study of Chinese realistic watercolour, deepen the knowledge of contemporary Chinese realistic watercolour, and provide a reference for the further development of Chinese realistic watercolour.

2. "REALISTIC" AND "IMAGERY"

In traditional Chinese painting theory, realism was not a term that was used. Realism, as an artistic movement, began in France in the 1850s. The style sought to describe life as it was, without idealization or romanticism. This was a departure from the traditional art of China, which tended to be highly stylized. Realism began to be introduced to China in the early 20th century, through the work of painters such as Xu Beihong and Liu Haisu. The introduction of the concept of "realism" to China came about through the process of Western learning and cultural exchanges between East and West and gradually became familiar to Chinese painters. Chinese artists have not simply adopted Western painting theory wholesale, but rather have studied it, borrowed from it, and then added their unique perspective to create something new. The concept of realism in traditional Western aesthetic theory can be traced back to the ancient Greek period when the theory of imitation was developed by the famous aesthetician Aristotle. The theory of imitation posits that art is a copy of reality and that the goal of art is to imitate reality as accurately as possible. This theory was extremely influential for many centuries, and it still informs much of Western aesthetic thought today. Realism in art is often understood as an attempt to represent the world as accurately as possible, without any distortion or embellishment. This tradition has its roots in the Greek concept of mimesis, which holds that art should imitate reality as closely as possible. Aristotle asked artists to reproduce and imitate objectively and as faithfully as possible, The realism of a painting is the most direct way of touching people's hearts. However, there are differences in the understanding of 'realism' between China and the West. First of all, The imaginative form has always been favoured by traditional Chinese culture, which emphasises "meaning" over "form", but does not completely abandon the pursuit of form, as ancient Chinese painters also believed that the process of painting must first respect objective laws and truly reflect the object it represents, fully reflecting Xunzi's

"realism". The ancient Chinese painters also believed that the process of painting insects must first respect the objective laws and be a true reflection of the object represented, fully embodying Xunzi's "form is present and God is born". Secondly, compared to the realistic reproduction of the West, traditional Chinese art has its aesthetic pursuit. Zhang Cao of the Tang dynasty put forward the idea that the painter should take nature as his teacher and express the real object, while at the same time combining the painter's subjective emotions and putting his feelings into the scene. The "form" is the basis of the "meaning", which means that the subjective emotions must be expressed through the reproduction of objective things. In other words, the way we subjectively experience the world must be conveyed through objective things to be communicated to others. This is the basis for meaning. To sum up, the connotation of "realism" in Chinese painting is unique in that it refers to the ability to reproduce and at the same time capture the essential characteristics of the object of expression, that is to say, "both form and spirit" [6].

"Imagery" is an important part of traditional Chinese aesthetics and has a rich meaning and connotation, which permeates all forms of art, including painting, literature, poetry and drama. In the case of traditional Chinese painting, for example, from Gu Kaizhi's "writing the spirit with the form" to "moving the mind", there is a certain element of "writing the will", but at that time there was no specific word for "writing the will". Wang Wei of the Tang Dynasty, in his "Landscape Tactics", says: "In all landscape painting, the intention is first in the brush", and Zhang Yan Yuan also stresses the importance of "the intention is first in the brush". It is a meaning that conveys the combination of the painting itself and the subjective sentiments of the author, pursuing a kind of interest beyond the image, focusing on the rhythm of meaning. Mr Pan Gongkai once said, "The relationship between life and art, between creation and the source of the heart, between writing the form and conveying the spirit, between poetry and painting, and so on, in Chinese painting theory, are all born out of the spiritual resources of Chinese culture and constitute the independence and uniqueness of Chinese painting. In this treasure trove of art left behind by the long river of Chinese painting, the Imagery of painting is a promising factor that is particularly worthy of study, summary and development. "[7] In the process of Chineseisation of watercolour, it is inevitable that traditional Chinese aesthetic concepts will be implanted, and that the "writing the will" of painting will naturally be reflected in the works, as this is the result of the aesthetic concepts inherent in Chinese watercolour painters. This is an important aspect of the Chineseisation of watercolour, and it is also an important aspect of the Chinese watercolour painting tradition.

3. CONTEMPORARY CHINESE REALISTIC WATERCOLOUR PAINTINGS: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE OF "IMAGERY"

3.1 Natural imagery : the aesthetic sensibility of "imagery"

In traditional Chinese aesthetic thought, Taoist aesthetics has a very important place. Taoist philosophy emphasizes the unity of all things in the universe and the harmony between humans and nature. Therefore, Taoist aesthetics emphasizes the simplicity and naturalness of things, and advocates returning to nature and achieving harmony with nature. Taoist aesthetics also emphasizes the importance of beauty and balance. For Taoists, beauty is not just about external appearance, but more importantly, about the inner harmony and balance of a thing. Therefore, they often use the concepts of "yin and yang" and "five elements" to describe the ideal state of a thing. Taoist aesthetics also has a strong influence on traditional Chinese arts such as painting, calligraphy, and architecture. Taoist philosophy emphasizes the importance of simplicity, naturalness, and harmony, which are also the key aesthetic principles of traditional Chinese arts. The theory of "inaction without inaction" is the foundation of Taoist aesthetics and has great importance in Laozi's philosophy. The principle of "inaction without inaction" includes both the unity of conformity and purpose, as

well as the meaning of conformity without purpose. The so-called "inaction" means that everything is following the laws of nature and that one does not pursue one's purposes outside of the laws of nature, but precisely in this way, one can achieve all purposes. This realm of purposelessness, or purposelessness and purposelessness, is in essence a realm of super-utilitarian aesthetics [8]. Taoist aesthetic thought advocates the beauty of simplicity and nature. Specifically, it advocates the natural beauty of the simple and unrefined. This means that Taoists believe that the simplest and most natural things are the most beautiful. Taoists believe that the beauty of simplicity and nature is more than skin deep. They believe that the simple and unrefined are more genuine and authentic than the artificial and refined. Therefore, the simple and unrefined are more beautiful to Taoists. Taoists also believe that the beauty of simplicity and nature is more than just physical. They believe that the simple and unrefined are more spiritual and closer to the Tao than the artificial and refined. Therefore, the simple and unrefined are more beautiful to Taoists.

Under the influence of this aesthetic concept, Chinese watercolour painters believe that true beauty is "half man-made, half made in heaven", and that the "man-made" "realistic" and "made in heaven" "natural" beauty are the same. Achieving a masterpiece requires a perfect balance of the 'realism' of 'man-made' and the 'meaningfulness' of 'made in heaven'. It is only through the perfect contrast of "realism" and "meaningfulness" that a masterpiece can be achieved. The "realism" of "man-made" must be balanced with the "meaningfulness" of "made in heaven" in order to create a masterpiece. Only by combining the "realism" of "man-made" with the 'meaningfulness' of "made in heaven" can a true masterpiece be created. Watercolour paintings are beautiful because of the way water and colour mix together. This natural process creates an aesthetic quality that cannot be achieved through other means. Watercolour paintings allow us to appreciate the beauty of nature in a way that is not possible with other types of paintings. The mixing of water and colour creates a sense of beauty that is unattainable by man. Watercolour paintings are a unique way to appreciate the beauty of nature. The water-based nature of the watercolour material allows this natural beauty to be brought into full play. In the process of painting, water and colour mingle and overlap, and nature constructs a sense of beauty that is unattainable by man. This adds to the aesthetic quality of the realistic watercolour painting. At the same time, this is also the embodiment of the principle of "doing nothing and doing nothing" in Laozi's philosophy. In addition, under the influence of a series of aesthetic propositions with profound philosophies, such as the ancient Chinese philosophers' "establishing an image to exhaust the meaning" and "looking up, looking down, looking up", traditional Chinese painting has gradually, through its long-term artistic practice and theoretical accumulation developed an aesthetic sense based on the pursuit of "lively spirit and charm". Through the process of artistic creation of "learning from the outside and getting the heart", traditional Chinese painting has gradually developed to pursue the expressive effect of "vividness". Through the artistic creation process of "learning from the outside and getting the source from the heart", the painting achieves a picture mood that can be "fully enjoyed" and "beyond the image". From the very beginning of Chinese painters' exposure to watercolour, the traditional concept of imaginative painting and aesthetic spirit has gradually shown its subtle and profound influence, as well as during subsequent periods of Chinese watercolour innovation and change. Chinese realistic watercolour painters have also naturally incorporated the imaginative spirit of traditional painting into the artistic expression of realistic watercolour, which is also in line with the traditional aesthetic idea of 'the unity of heaven and man', i.e. the integration of subject and object, and romantic and lyrical, thus giving Chinese realistic watercolour art a This is also in line with the traditional aesthetic idea of "the unity of heaven and man", i.e. the integration of subject and object, and the romantic and lyrical aesthetic, thus giving Chinese realistic watercolour art an ethereal and elegant poetic quality [9].

In her work "Mist of the North Sea", the young painter Sun Lili does not deliberately portray the structure of the fishing boat or the ripples of the water surface, but rather fuses the hull of the fishing boat with the sea

surface, allowing the watercolour paint to flow naturally and produce the texture effect of "water splashes", creating a unique aesthetic interest through the contrast between the sparseness of the large and small "water splashes". Painter Zhao Jitong does not paint the picture fully in the usual way in his watercolour work "An auspicious light", but boldly leaves the picture white and builds the structure of the picture according to his subjective vision. The background is tilted to allow the paint to flow naturally downwards under the force of gravity while ensuring sufficient moisture, creating the effect of sparse and dense line composition, and at the same time creating a kind of "heavenly" beauty. Though the act of painting is purposeless, the final product aligns with the artist's intent, demonstrating the aesthetic idea that 'nothing is done but nothing is done'. The artist uses the flow of paint to create a work of art that reflects their aesthetic idea. This idea is based on the philosophy that "nothing is done but nothing is done". This means that the artist is not trying to create a specific image or result, but is instead letting the paint flow freely to create a work of art that reflects their idea. Huang Huazhao's watercolour figure paintings are profoundly realistic, with a free flow of expression, both delicate and subtle portrayal, as well as spontaneous and bold "writing". In his 2017 series, the faces of the figures are delicately and transparently depicted, making full use of the ontological language of watercolour. However, the treatment of the clothes and the backgrounds is very "writing the will", with a few large blocks of colour applied in a dashing and casual manner, presenting an aesthetic of "imagery". This is in contrast to the more traditional approach of painting every detail with great care. The large areas of colour give the impression that the artist has been very confident and decisive in their brushstrokes. This combination of "realism" and "imagery" is even more evident in his "Spiritual Light" series, where large brushes are applied freely, the doors of the background blend with the light, and the natural bleeding of the watercolour produces a watery quality of "The natural bleeding" of the water colours produces a water-based quality of "light", which fits the theme of 'spiritual light' and is precisely the "spiritual light" of the artist in his creation. Liu Yi's watercolour landscape painting, "Water Follows the Sky", uses a combination of realistic modelling techniques and hazy, generalised brushstrokes to create the unique watery mood of China's Jiangnan water village, demonstrating the poetic mood of Chinese painting. In addition to fully expressing the accidental beauty of watercolour paint itself, the painters also actively explored the "natural" beauty of some new materials in their watercolour paintings. For example, in his watercolour work "Fire and Ambition - China's Firefighting Force", young painter Shao Yuhao uses a realistic approach to portray the dynamics and expressions of the characters, but in some parts, he uses a mixture of asphalt and watercolour paint, which not only enhances the contrast of the materials in the painting but also creates a sense of urgency as the firefighters sacrifice their lives to save others in the blazing fire. The asphalt material flows naturally under the action of water to the artist's intentions, creating a flowing and ethereal aesthetic. At the same time, the rough texture of the asphalt material contrasts with the delicate transparency of the watercolour paint, enriching the expressive language of watercolour painting. This "imagery" in Chinese realistic watercolour painting is not deliberate on the part of the painter but is an aesthetic cognitive approach formed unconsciously by the Chinese watercolour painter, an aesthetic interest that is related to the environment in which the painter grew up, and to the millennia of cultural accumulation of the Chinese nation. It is also this aesthetic interest with national characteristics that makes contemporary Chinese realistic watercolour present a different face from that of the West.

3.2 White space: the "imagery" of composition

The composition of traditional Chinese painting has a very strong "imagery" character. In Chinese painting, the composition is a flat, two-dimensional visual space. This is called "scattered perspective," and it is very different from the Western "focal perspective." In the focal perspective, the composition is based on a single point of view, and the objects in the painting appear to recede into the distance from that point. In scattered

perspective, the composition is based on multiple points of view, and the objects in the painting appear to be scattered around the picture plane. This difference in perspective results in a very different overall look and feel to Chinese and Western paintings. Compared to Western painting, traditional Chinese painting uses the "eye and mind" method of observation, "viewing the small with the large" and "moving and remembering". This means that artists take in the entire scene before them and then focus on the details, rather than painting what they see in front of them. In addition, Chinese painting is concerned with the composition of a painting, which is a combination of traditional Chinese painting and traditional Chinese painting. This focus on composition creates a more unified and pleasing painting. In addition, Chinese painting is concerned with 'leaving white space' in its composition, so that less is more, leaving room for the viewer's imagination. By leaving negative space in the composition, the artist allows the viewer to fill in the blanks and create their interpretation of the painting. This technique can add depth and meaning to the artwork, and ultimately create a more personal connection between the viewer and the painting. The blank space in traditional Chinese painting is not empty, but rather a space in which one can savour endless interest. Traditional painting is about seeking truth in emptiness, leaving a proper blank space on the screen, and reflecting an ethereal and minimalist beauty in the contrast between black and white and reality. In painting, it is important to "know the white" to "keep the black". Black and white contains philosophical implications of opposites, such as reality and emptiness, presence and absence, sparseness and simplicity, and so on, and therefore cannot be discussed simply in terms of black and white. In addition, traditional Chinese painting is concerned with the "placement of white and black, and the creation of reality and emptiness", and the ancients stressed that "the idea comes before the brush". Therefore, the creation of white space in Chinese painting must be considered in the overall context. This is why the creation of white space in Chinese painting must be considered in the overall context, to express the overall sense of balance and space of the painting [10]. The "white" in watercolour painting is often not obtained by covering it with white paint, but by leaving the watercolour paper white, which is the same principle as the "white" in traditional Chinese painting. This is the same principle as that of "white space" in traditional Chinese painting, except that the "white space" in Western watercolour painting is often improvised and accidental, focusing on its interest and appearing only as an aesthetic element, unlike the aesthetics of traditional Chinese painting, where it is used as part of the composition and layout before painting, and given a deeper connotation such as imagination, mood and rhythm. In addition, in terms of compositional treatment, the painting is either long or short, square or round, with a wide variety of forms and proportions, such as vertical scrolls, horizontal scrolls, long scrolls and fans, with emphasis on the main and secondary aspects, the real and imaginary, the hidden and exposed, the open and closed, the sparse and dense, the complicated and simple, and the unity of the opposing elements.

Compared to the West, the Chinese-style aesthetic concept of composition is more free and romantic, reflecting the Taoist aesthetic thought. Watercolour painting is a Western genre, and in essence, it cannot be equated with Chinese painting, nor can it be separated from the Western system of light and colour modelling. We should not treat watercolour as exclusively Chinese painting, but it can reflect the Chinese understanding of composition, shape, etc. in an aesthetic context. For example, the painter Ying Jinfei pays great attention to the white space in his watercolour compositions; his figures are often not complete, with mutilated faces and blurred features, leaving room everywhere in the picture. In his new work "Isolation" in 2020, he leaves a large area of white space in the picture, arranging the figures on the left side of the picture, with some parts of the figures sometimes hidden in the white space, and sometimes highlighted from the white space, showing a kind of "image outside the image" in the picture, reflecting the "intentionality" of the composition. In the "Dancers" series, the artist has been able to create a "visual image", reflecting the "intentionality" of the composition. In the Dancers series, on the other hand, a scattered perspective is used, the background is flattened, and the

figures are deconstructed and reconstructed to give a wonderful effect of otherworldly space. Zhu Zhigang's realistic water-based figure paintings have absorbed the traditional Chinese composition form of large-captioned figure painting, with a wide openness and grandeur in the treatment of points, lines and surfaces, expressing the interest of leaving the edges of the picture white. It also uses the treatment of splashing, scattering and dripping to form occasional dots and lines to regulate the rhythm of the overall picture composition, which has a very strong sense of modernity, which in turn differs from the traditional sense of composition form. Painter Pan Jianglong's watercolour work "Peaceful Fruit Series" has a Chinese-inspired composition, where the picture is not painted full, but left white on the edges of the picture to create a mood. The apples are shaped using some Western realism, and also show some light and shadow effects, leaving the bright parts of the paper directly white to create a strong sense of light, while the branches and leaves are outlined using traditional Chinese painting techniques, and some branches and leaves are combined into one, using minimal colour intensity to express their flavour. The overall composition focuses on the composition of dots, lines and surfaces and the variety of positive and negative shapes to create a vivid rhythm. Also in his work, "The Southern Mountains with Bamboo", the image of the bamboo is carefully laid out as a line element in the picture, with the sparseness of the lines forming the rhythm of the picture and guiding the viewer's eye to focus on the main area of the picture. The bamboo leaves are not entirely shaped in realistic green, but rather some bright green is retained in the visual centre of the picture, while the other leaves are mostly in heavy colours, while a small amount of space is left in the large area of heavy colours, breaking the dullness of the heavy colours and making the expression of the main subject of the picture both heavy with a sense of history and vivid with interest. The contrast between the "broken" and "standing" lines, the closed and open edges of the picture, and the "realism" of the bamboo leaves and the stones, the contrast between the "realism" of the bamboo leaves and the "realism" of the stones presents a sense of oriental humanism in the painting. Furthermore, Chinese watercolour painters have worked to investigate the visual properties of the canvas; this addition of movement makes the paintings more realistic. Some painters break away from the traditional rectangular composition and instead adopt a circular composition to represent some still-life subjects. These compositional forms are not simply visual, but fit in with the author's intention of expression. Because some objects have a special symbolic meaning in Chinese conception, for example, persimmons symbolise good fortune, pomegranates symbolise many children and happiness, and the circle itself signifies completeness and happiness, the use of a circular composition to represent these objects achieves a high degree of unity between the content and form of the picture. In addition to the common square and circle compositions, some painters also use the traditional Chinese painting fan composition to express some of the ancient imagery and rhythms, and some painters deliberately destroy the edges of the paper to create a sense of irregularity, giving people a new visual experience.

3.3 Colouring with the class: the "imagery" of colour

The theory of "assigning colours to classes" comes from the Wei and Jin dynasties of ancient China, and was proposed by Xie He in his book "The Book of Ancient Paintings". Xie He said in his book, "What are the six methods? One is vividness, the other is the use of the brush in bone, the third is the use of the image, the fourth is the use of colour, the fifth is the use of position, and the sixth is the transfer of the mould." [11] "Assigning a colour to the class" means dividing the objects in the painting into several categories and applying one colour to each category. It was initially a colouring technique for figure painting, where the face, hands and costumes of figures were categorised and coloured, and as it was used and expanded, it was gradually applied to green landscape and bird and flower painting. For example, in landscape painting, the mountains, water, trees and rocks in different seasons are coloured separately. Flower and bird paintings are also coloured

according to the different colours of flowers, grasses, trees and birds. The study of "colouring with the class" has never ceased, and scholars have continued to research and expand on it. Traditionally, "colouring with the class" was the practice of colouring according to the colour of the object itself, giving different images in the picture their colour and giving them a colour meaning [12]. However, as researchers have continued to explore and develop Chinese painting theories and techniques based on inherited traditions, the understanding of "assigning a colour to the class" has also changed considerably. Modern painters and scholars have added many new ideas to their theoretical research, and in practice have made bold experiments and breakthroughs in the use of colour, providing many new directions for exploration. At this time, the "colouring with the class" was no longer just a matter of pursuing the objective depiction of objects, but rather an expression of subjective emotions and a more contemporary approach to expression [13]. In terms of the concept of colour, Chinese painters considered colour to be only one part of a comprehensive conception. They did not need to overly pursue subtle colour variations and light effects but focused on grasping the macroscopic colour palette. This allowed them to create expressive and powerful paintings. This approach to painting is in line with the Chinese philosophy of finding beauty in the simple and the humble, and of achieving harmony between the artist and the painting. As such, Chinese painting is more concerned with the overall effect of the colours used, rather than with any particular technical details.

In the contemporary context, colour should be connected to human society, expressing the social and cultural nature of human beings through colour. This connection can be made through the use of colour in design, art, and other areas of human activity. Colour can be used to express the diversity of human culture, and to reflect the changing nature of human society. By using colour in this way, we can create a more colourful and vibrant world. Nowadays we understand the "class" in "colour with class" to mean the subject's perception of the ontological reality of nature, which seems more in line with the literati view of colour in the history of painting. The cultural symbolism attached to colour represents the lyricism of the individual in expressing his life [14]. Under the influence of this concept, Chinese watercolour painters have broken away from the traditional Western system of realistic colours, instead focusing on expressing inner emotions and the perception of objects. This shift creates a colour "imagery" that is more in tune with the heart. This change in perspective has been brought about by the concept of "colour rules". These rules focus on the emotions and perceptions of the artist, rather than on realism. This allows for a greater range of expression and creativity. Overall, this change has resulted in watercolour paintings that are more expressive and emotive. They reflect the inner thoughts and feelings of the artist, rather than simply replicating reality. In the overall colour layout of the picture, the artist seeks to generalise and summarise, focusing on the conceptual, symbolic and spiritual nature of the colours used. For example, in the series of works of the young watercolourist Zhao Long, the pine trees still follow the traditional realistic expression, but the colour expression is detached from reality, with black as the main colour, which has the pictorial meaning of traditional Chinese ink painting. This series of works is an excellent example of how traditional Chinese painting techniques can be used in a modern context. This creates a unique and interesting perspective that can be enjoyed by viewers. In Western realistic watercolour painting, black is not often used, but in the traditional Chinese painting concept of "five colours of ink", black is infinitely variable, with the "ink method" of 'thick, light, broken, splashed, cumulative, burnt and lodged'. The variation of the "ink method" gives the expression of black a wider space and a richer connotation. The pine trees in Zhao Long's painting not only embody the colourful imagery with a strong Chinese flavour but at the same time do not lose the qualities of the watercolour medium itself. Wang Biao's "Closing Work No. 86" uses minimal colour, using only black and orange, with black as the dominant colour, demonstrating the Chinese painter's bold exploration of the use of 'black' in watercolour. The use of black over a large area of the painting is richly layered, with endless variations in shades of wet and dry, and the painting has both figurative

and imaginative elements. The painting has both figurative and imaginative elements. The use of black creates a sense of depth and mystery, while the figurative elements provide a sense of grounding and reality. The combination of these two elements makes for a rich and engaging painting.

3.4 The rhythm of the brush: the "imagery" of the brushwork

The growth of foreign painting in the local area is inevitably intertwined with the local culture, and watercolour painting as an imported genre is no different. Watercolour painting is a water-based material and is essentially similar to traditional Chinese ink painting, which emphasises the use of brushwork and the expression of mood, providing an opportunity for watercolour painting to integrate. Chinese painting requires "writing", which is the highest level of painting, and it is only by 'writing' that works can be vivid and random. Only by writing can we achieve the vivid artistic effect of both expressing the object's form and conveying the painter's feelings. The main brushstrokes in Chinese ink painting are outlining, chapping, rubbing, dabbing and dyeing. Outlining is the first main brushstroke in Chinese ink painting. It is done by creating a thick line with the tip of the brush. Chapping is the next main brushstroke and is done by rubbing the brush against the paper to create a rough texture. Rubbing is the next main brushstroke and is done by moving the brush in a circular motion. Dabbing is the last main brushstroke and is done by pressing the brush against the paper and then lifting it. Finally, dyeing is the last main brushstroke and is done by using a pigment to add colour to the painting. By applying these brushstrokes to watercolour painting, the expressive power of the surface can be greatly enhanced. Watercolour also has something in common with ink and wash in terms of the brushes used. Water-based materials are suitable for painting with soft brushes, which are highly absorbent, easy to sketch and flexible, with expressive and expressive brush strokes. Chinese and Western brushes differ in their usage habits and stylistic features, but both use animal hair more often than not. Chinese painters specialise in the use of brushes and have unique insights into the characteristics and performance of brushes: the writing characteristics of the medium-edge brush are concerned with the posture of the brush, the vividness of the brush, its natural flow and its rigidity and flexibility. In the field of calligraphy, the ultimate in abstract art, the primary stage involves learning how to hold and move the brush, as well as improving finger and wrist strength, and strict requirements for pointing, skimming, strokes, staccato and control of thickness and dryness. Chinese watercolour painters seek strength and thickness in the movement of the brush, and pay attention to the procedural nature of the brush, so the brushwork reveals shades of Chinese calligraphy, while the strokes also imply the artist's feelings. The process of creating a work of art is often a solitary one, as the artist concentrates on the precise movements of the brush to produce the desired effect. This focus on the physical act of painting allows for a richness and complexity of expression not found in other genres and makes Chinese watercolour a highly prized medium. Chinese watercolour painters have given careful consideration to how they can best inherit traditional brushwork methods, and this thought is based on a thorough understanding of the characteristics of watercolour painting materials and the artistic features of watercolour painting, combined with their aesthetic concepts and personal style, to create a unique Chinese realistic watercolour look. Although there are only a few traditional painting brushstrokes, Chinese watercolourists have used them to create a distinctive watercolour style with its language of expression.

Li Xiaolin is a painter who makes full use of traditional painting brushwork. His paintings are characterized by strong brushwork and bright colours. His brushwork draws on the traditional Chinese ink figure painting style, using a combination of centre, side, smooth and reverse fronts, with flat, rounded, left-over and heavy lines in a very harmonious relationship, while the lines are richly varied, with staccato, turning, thick and thin, continuous, fast and slow, with the unique Chinese mood of brushwork and ink. In addition, his watercolour figures are vivid, with their clothes and backgrounds treated flatly. This, combined with a strong Chinese

aesthetic appeal, thanks to the use of chiaroscuro strokes, makes for a very pleasing and visually interesting painting. Wang Haitao is also a watercolour painter who incorporates traditional painting strokes into the language of realistic watercolour expression, and his works show the distinctive aesthetic interest of contemporary Chinese realistic watercolour brushwork. Wang Haitao's paintings are known for their realistic style and unique use of traditional Chinese painting techniques. His work often features landscapes and scenes from everyday life, and his use of light and colour creates a sense of atmosphere and mood. He uses finely etched realistic techniques and ethereal and agile brushwork in his watercolour landscapes. This strong contrast between wet and dry strokes gives his realistic landscapes a sense of fluidity. His use of finely etched realistic techniques combined with ethereal and agile brushwork creates a strong contrast between wet and dry strokes. This contrast gives his realistic landscapes a sense of fluidity. The strong contrast between wet and dry strokes in his watercolour landscapes is created by his use of finely etched realistic techniques and ethereal and agile brushwork. This contrast gives his landscapes a sense of fluidity. By using both finely etched realistic techniques and ethereal and agile brushwork, he creates a strong contrast between wet and dry strokes in his watercolour landscapes. His watercolour paintings of people also make full use of the brushwork of Chinese ink painting, such as his earlier works "Youth and Yearning", which are very realistic from a distance, but on closer inspection, one can see that the brushwork is vivid and relaxed, full of "imagery". The colours are bright and the lines are fluid. It seems like the artist was very confident while painting this, and it shows in the final product. Painter Zhu Zhigang's watercolour paintings of figures often start with the brushwork of Chinese painting, using line modelling to first outline the outline and dark parts of the figure in monochrome, then apply watercolours to shape the form, using a combination of dry and wet painting methods, the boldness of linear modelling and the delicacy of facial details form a strong contrast, presenting an oriental flavour different from that of Western watercolour painting. The borrowing, fusion, and reconstruction of these techniques have fully expanded the realistic language of watercolour painting. The effect of the picture is fine but not cloying, thick, and transparent. These advances in technology have allowed for a more realistic approach to watercolour painting, resulting in pictures that are both aesthetically pleasing and accurate representations of the subject matter.

4. CONCLUSION

In the process of the Chineseisation of watercolour, contemporary Chinese realistic watercolour painters have incorporated "imagery" into the language of watercolour expression, presenting a unique language of realistic painting and achieving notable results, gradually developing watercolour painting from a small genre to a medium-sized genre. Contemporary Chinese realistic watercolour painting has taken on a unique appearance that is different from that of Western watercolour, reflecting the new perception and thinking of Chinese painters towards watercolour. Chinese painters have developed their methods and techniques for painting watercolours, which are different from those used in the West. This has resulted in a distinctive Chinese style of watercolour painting that is recognised internationally. In this study, I find that the unique expressive language characteristics of Chinese realistic watercolour are rooted in traditional Chinese aesthetic thought, especially the aesthetic thought embedded in Taoist philosophy, and that this has given rise to the cultural connotation of the concept of creation and the aesthetic connotation of Chinese realistic watercolour. Under the influence of Taoist aesthetic thought, Chinese watercolour painters' perception of the concept of imagery differs from that of the West.

On the other hand, they are constantly integrating and innovating in the language of expression, rooted in tradition, incorporating the composition, brushwork and ink techniques of traditional painting into the language of expression to emphasise the expressive nature of watercolour, while at the same time introducing the graphic

and expressive concepts of contemporary art and boldly pushing the boundaries in terms of materials and expressive techniques. Some watercolour painters have begun to explore and form their symbolic language in realistic watercolour expression and have made breakthroughs. This has allowed them to create paintings that are more expressive and have a greater impact. By developing their symbolic language, these watercolour painters have been able to communicate their ideas more effectively. This has led to more interesting and innovative paintings. The use of symbols in watercolour painting is not new, but how these artists are using them is. This is resulting in some exciting and unique paintings. These watercolour painters are pushing the boundaries of what is possible with this medium, and the results are truly stunning. Watercolour painting is now gaining more and more attention. An expanding group of painters are receiving more attention, with more exhibitions and events being created to showcase their work. This newfound popularity is due to the unique properties of watercolour paintings, which create an ethereal and dreamlike quality. The increased popularity of watercolour painting is sure to lead to even more amazing works of art being created. However, in the midst of the euphoric trend, we should calmly consider how to continue to enhance the spiritual connotation of realistic watercolour painting, and how to turn "imagery" into a visual symbolic language for the Chinese watercolour community. We need to be clear about what we are pursuing, and what kind of painting we want to achieve. We should have a correct understanding of the relationship between "imagery" and spiritual connotation, and never lose sight of our ultimate goal. This is a question we need to give serious thought to during the next stage.

REFERENCES

- [1] Xie He *The Book of Ancient Paintings*, Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 1991.
- [2] Liu Gangji, *A History of Chinese Aesthetics (first volume)*, Oriental Publishing Center, 2021.
- [3] Yuan Zhenzao, *The History of Chinese Watercolor Painting*, Shanghai Jinxiu Article Publishing House, 2009.
- [4] Qin Cui, *Exploring the value of contemporary realistic watercolour painting in China*, Shenyang Normal University, MA thesis, 2013.
- [5] Huang Jing *The production of "rhyme" in traditional art, White space and traditional art*, Huazhong Normal University, Master's thesis, 2019.
- [6] Zhao Fen, *A Reanalysis of "Colouring with Class"*, China Academy of Art, M.A. thesis, 2021.
- [7] Liu Yao, *A New Interpretation of Fugitive Colour with Categories*, China Academy of Art, PhD thesis, 2013.
- [8] Jiang Yue, *On the National Consciousness of Chinese Watercolor Painting*, *New Art* (01), 2015.
- [9] Niu Jie, *An inquiry into the realistic language of contemporary watercolour painting*, *Popular Literature and Art* (11), 2016.
- [10] Yu Jing, *Study on the creation and expression of contemporary realistic watercolour artworks*, *Popular Literature and Art* (21), 2016.
- [11] Jing Shaojia, *The Imaginative Characteristics of Chinese Watercolor from Classical Chinese Aesthetic Thought*, *Sichuan Theatre* (10), 2013.
- [12] Pan Jianglong, *Exploration of the Road to Chineseness in Watercolor*, *Art in General* (03), 2020.
- [13] 4. Web Literature
- [14] Pan Gongkai, *Writeness: a point of contact between future Chinese oil painting and traditional Chinese culture*, 2009, <https://www.chinaops.org/page/250.html>.