



# Han Meilin's Style Path of Creating Zodiac Art

Tianzi Sheng<sup>(✉)</sup>

School of Gemology, China University of Geosciences, Beijing 100083, China  
460293944@qq.com

**Abstract.** Han Meilin's art works of the Chinese zodiac have always been concerned and loved by all sectors of the society, including stamps, sculptures, handicrafts, and art exhibitions of the Chinese zodiac. It can be seen that Han Meilin's zodiac image conforms to the ideal model in people's hearts. From the perspective of subject creative power, this paper extracts Han Meilin's method of transforming the cultural gene of Chinese zodiac, and provides a style path for contemporary zodiac art.

**Keywords:** Zodiac Art · Style path · Han Meilin · Subject creative power

## 1 Introduction

The Chinese zodiac culture is a typical traditional folk culture in China, which runs through the whole process of social development. People use the Chinese zodiac to mark the year, age and generation. It is a cultural symbol that is well known and loved by all people, and reflects the Chinese people's worship of animals and respect for nature in their traditional genes. Moreover, each person has a specific zodiac sign from birth, which makes their life form closely related to the natural laws such as the earthly branches and the five elements. Therefore, the social attention is very high. Even today, it is also an indispensable part of modern culture. It has been integrated into people's daily life in a cultural form that symbolizes auspiciousness. For example, Han Meilin's zodiac stamps, zodiac sculptures, and zodiac handicrafts have become the mascots that people place their hopes on. They are not only the modern interpretation of traditional culture, but also the transmission of national spirit from generation to generation [1]. The author starts from the problem and thinks about the reasons for this phenomenon, that is, why does Han Meilin's zodiac art meet the ideal model in people's hearts?

## 2 Moral Power: The Aesthetic Path of Creating Zodiac Art

Based on subject creative power, "moral power" is the power of artists' thoughts and moral quality. It can grasp the right and wrong of behavior, standardize the direction of aesthetic activities, and determine the overall spiritual power of artistic works [2].

## 2.1 The Behavior of Moral Power

In the 1960s, Han Meilin was imprisoned at No. 100 Dongshan in Huainan, China, and suffered four years in prison. Although he experienced the double blows of spirit and body, he still redeemed his soul in the world of art, enjoyed the joy of painting and created a lot of cute little animal paintings, In an effort to show more conscious pursuit of truth, goodness and beauty through life spirituality [3].

### (1) Sense of justice

Before entering prison, Han Meilin was paraded in the street and stood on the steps in front of the auditorium. He instantly felt like painting, so he drew a chicken on the ground with the tip of his shoe dipped in blood, which was a standing cock. It can be seen that, for him, art is the beautiful innocence in the cruel world, the instinctive happiness in the ascetic life, and the fairness and justice in the emotional grievances.

### (2) Human nature

During the suffering, the appearance of a dog gave Han Meilin the most important strength, because its company is the only “human nature” in a society without humanity, which made Han Meilin decide to hold the pen and march towards beauty and hope. In 1973, he created the first puppy animal painting, little friend in distress, which became a moving masterpiece of that era.

### (3) The spirit of great love

After he was released from prison, Han Meilin developed a passion of great love. Perhaps it is because of the ups and downs that he understands the value of love, loves everything in life, and treats all small animals with maternal love and finds that every animal has a beautiful side [4]. For example, we can see the precious quality of “tenacity” in the “mouse”, the precious quality of “Fortitude” in the “horse”, and the precious quality of “diligence” in the “cow”... By changing the perspective of observing the world, the image of Han Meilin's zodiac animal is loved by everyone [5].

## 2.2 The Method of Moral Power

Han Meilin endows his works with the life characteristics of “baby image”, so that the viewers can quickly generate a psychological resonance of hope and care when they see the works, and thus generate a sense of justice, human nature and great love. Some psychological research shows that when people face the weak and lovely life body, they cannot help but have a desire to protect. This is a human innate release mechanism triggered by the image of the baby, which makes people have a positive emotional response. At the same time, Han Meilin also integrated the traditional Chinese ink painting with the modern western watercolor painting, and explored a kind of brush and ink effect to assist the expression of the baby image and make the zodiac animal appear the lovely effect of “hairy, fluffy, elegant and flexible” (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Aesthetic characteristics of Han Meilin's zodiac art

### 3 Development Power: The National Path of Creating Zodiac Art

Based on the subject creative power, the “development power” refers to the artist’s desire to create and invent in the art career and surpass the needs and desires of the predecessors. It is a force to realize the value of self-life and prove the value of self-existence.

#### 3.1 The Behavior of Development Power

After the self-destruction of the traditional cultural belief in the cultural revolution, the upsurge of reflection and exploration of national culture popped up. In 1978, Han Meilin’s team took the lead in stepping out of the system and creating the “Art Caravan” project. He went to various parts of the country to collect and work. He chose to seek the hope of personal development in folk art resources and integrate folk language into the creation of zodiac images [6].

##### (1) Inspect calico

Han Meilin successively inspected the folk calico in Nantong, Jiangsu (blue calico), Linyi, Shandong (cloth-wrappers), Kaili, Guizhou (batik technology) through the Art Caravan, and created a variety of silhouette outline animal combination patterns, which is an image of the Chinese zodiac.

##### (2) Inspect cloth tiger

Han Meilin successively inspected the folk cloth tiger puppets in Shandong, Shanxi, Shaanxi through the Art Caravan, and created the cloth tiger handicrafts with round forehead, huge facial features and high tail. It is an exaggerated image of the Chinese zodiac that is very different from the real tiger [7].

##### (3) Inspect embroidery

Han Meilin successively inspected the folk embroidery in Northern Shaanxi, Shandong through the Art Caravan, and created a series of embroidery works “chicken” with finer design, more flexible form and bolder color matching, which is a kind of decoration zodiac image using linear changes and gorgeous colors on the two-dimensional plane as much as possible.



Fig. 2. National characteristics of Han Meilin's zodiac art

### 3.2 The Method of Development Power

Han Meilin has long studied the language form of folk art. On the one hand, he insists on driving the “Art Caravan” to the grassroots unit, traveling all over the country, and taking the initiative to the production line and the fields to investigate calico, cloth tiger and embroidery. He nourishes his artistic personality in the folk land where art treasures are everywhere, and provides rich visual expression means for re shaping the image of the Chinese zodiac. On the other hand, the zodiac art is often attributed to the animal theme in people's daily life. However, due to the long-term symbolic treatment of animal images, the zodiac art has a rigid and objective external image from the shape to the artistic conception. Han Meilin constantly feeds back his artistic achievements to the grassroots, and cooperates with folk artists to create a frank, unrestrained, gorgeous and lovely zodiac image, jointly promote the inheritance and development of folk art, and become the fresh factor required by the creation of the Chinese zodiac (Fig. 2).

## 4 Imagination Power: The Modern Path of Creating Zodiac Art

Based on subject creative power, “imagination power” refers to the ability of artists to depict pictures in their minds, including the way of thinking and knowledge structure for effectively processing information, processing various complex images, and artistic creation.

### 4.1 The Behavior of Imagination Power

Since the reform and open, modernity has become the theme of art development in the new era, and it is still hot discussion. While pursuing artistic individuality in the folk, Han Meilin discovered the wisdom of the ancient Chinese people in understanding the natural image - the character image, which aroused his infinite imagination. By excavating the configuration creativity and order aesthetic feeling in the ancient characters and images, he found our nation's endogenous modernity and created the style language of Tianshu based on the ancient Chinese characters, which lets the zodiac image have more possibilities to connect with the culture of the times.

#### (1) The configuration creativity of character image

Han Meilin got rid of the dogmatism of the academic school through the ancient Chinese characters, and made his art move towards the impossible and boundless. He said that the

teaching of “animal images” in our current art is based on the geometric abstraction from West. However, in our ancient Chinese characters, there are both traditional and modern animal images. They are art and designs based on what people see, hear, touch, smell and taste, which breeds the image foundation of Oriental modeling creation and is the unique temperament and charm of the Chinese nation [8]. Therefore, Han Meilin explored the configuration creativity and aesthetic power of the ancient Chinese characters by means of points, lines, faces, circles, and opening and closing, it creates horses that are not like horses and sheep that are not like sheep. It is a kind of zodiac image between words and pictures, as if walking through the historical space-time created by nature, with strong modern modeling characteristics.

## (2) The order aesthetic of character image

In the process of collecting and studying ancient Chinese characters, Han Meilin discovered Helan Mountain rock paintings that are older than ancient Chinese characters and closer to pictures. It not only has the function of writing and communication, but also has the ability to simplify animal modeling, deepening his refining method, and thus integrating the zodiac image into the broad, great and modern animal image. Therefore, rock paintings have a great impact on Han Meilin. This abstract and refined aesthetic sense of order exists in his modern zodiac image like a fetus, which provides a great imaginable space for his pen and schema reconstruction [9].

## 4.2 The Method of Imagination Power

Since ancient times, China has had the tradition of “calligraphy and painting are of the same origin”, but this concept has many disputes in the development of calligraphy and painting. Due to the intervention of western modernity, “calligraphy” develops along the direction of “abstract” and “painting” develops along the direction of “concrete”. Few people can truly achieve the artistic creation of “same source”. However, Han Meilin found the endogenous modernity of “ancient Chinese characters” at the junction of the two directions. Among them, “configuration creativity” and “order aesthetics” are effective “same source” under the vision of modern life, this created the style language of Tianshu based on the ancient Chinese characters. Here, there are not only the clear wind and bright moon, birds and animals, green mountains and green waters left over from Chinese history that have not become official characters, but also a large number of zodiac animal. Their strengthened personality and simplified form have similar artistic characteristics with modernism, providing an effective way for the Chinese Zodiac culture gene to merge into modern times [10] (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Modern characteristics of Han Meilin’s zodiac art

## 5 Conclusion

The zodiac image in Han Meilin's style is a cultural product of the integration of artists' personal creation and real life. His creative behavior driven by moral power, development power and imagination power, which can transform the cultural gene of the Chinese zodiac, so as to create an image of the Chinese zodiac that conforms to the ideal in people's hearts [11]. Therefore, the creative path of Han Meilin's zodiac image has certain enlightenment value for the contemporary zodiac creation: first, the aesthetic characteristics of "cute" zodiac art can be nurtured through the baby image; Secondly, the national characteristics of "auspicious" of zodiac art can be shaped through folk language; Third, the modern characteristics of "fashion" zodiac art can be realized through ancient Chinese characters.

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