



A Analysis of Citizen Life in 17th Century Dutch Genre Painting

Jingwen Ding^(✉)

School of Art, University of Science Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia
dingachieve@163.com

Abstract. This topic is a holistic study of Dutch 17th-century genre painting and related civic life, through the analysis of painting secular life themes, Then it analyzes the development and innovation of the Dutch style in this period and previous painting, which is also the milestone of Dutch painting in the 17th century is the European painting from religious myth to secular, at this time we see no longer religious theme painting, but to focus on people's life, This is also a new breakthrough in the history of painting. The main contribution of Dutch painting in the 17th century was the secularization of the subject matter. There was a positive influence behind the 17th-century Dutch civilization, which was the direct influence of the Reformation. Starting from the historical background of paintings and theme figures, this paper adopts the research method of artistic imagery to analyze and interpret the study of citizen life themes in Dutch genre paintings in the 17th century, and sorts out, inspects and studies the painter's ideas and creation methods. Many works reveal the atmosphere of social life and elegance, and have been favored by different classes. This also played a decisive role in the aesthetic taste of the social residents and the whole society at that time, and had an impact on the later generations. This paper will analyze the historical background of the uniqueness of Dutch genre painting in the 17th century, and analyze the painting art characteristics of folk life themes.

Keywords: Dutch genre painting · 17th-century · Citizen life

1 Introduction

The 17th century Netherlands was a golden age, then the most advanced marine traffic in Europe, with the title of "Sea Coachman", through this advantage, the Dutch citizens bought the autonomy of the city from the aristocracy. At that time, a great deal of social wealth was in the hands of bourgeois citizens, the Dutch life wealthy families often buy works of art to decorate their living environment, and funding for the arts have a wide range of foundation. Culturally influenced by Calvinism, painters begin to pay attention to the theme of the daily life, and use in the works. As a result, the viewer by 17th century Dutch genre painter works to feel real life scenes of the Dutch society at that time. This article attempts through the analysis of the 17th century European art and the characteristics of the Dutch genre painting art, European art will be focused on

the subject of life, let the reader understand the Dutch genre painting in the history of life connotation and expression characteristics. This analysis will use the Dutch genre painting works to assist to explore life subject characteristic of the plain, pure and true. This paper believes that the uniqueness and innovation of Dutch genre painting enable civic life to create an aesthetic standard, which makes the aesthetic interest of civic life subjects get higher attention in academic art.

2 The 17th Century European Art

The European art in the 17th century was an important stage in the development of art history [1], but the Baroque art in the 17th century and the Dutch genre painting produced a double avoidance trend. Baroque art parsing the meaning of this word is different, some scholars believe that the baroque is beads, odd and eccentric meaning, however classicism, baroque is the meaning of fall collapse, in the later got a fair evaluation. The style of the Baroque works mainly takes religion as the theme, and the connotation of the works has a strong romantic color, but the most basic characteristic is to break the serious expression style of the Renaissance period, and advocate the luxurious expression of the life. The works have both religious characteristics and hedonism color. However, in the Dutch genre paintings, the Protestant Reformation brought a new idea to the Netherlands. In the 16th century of Europe, when religious conflicts and political instability continued, the newly independent Dutch government stipulated that Dutch residents could enjoy freedom of religious belief and were no longer limited by religious doctrine. In the 17th century Dutch completely out of from the religious thoughts. Under the dual effects of the Reformation and the Renaissance, the Dutch gradually clarified their pursuit of value tendencies, From the 17th century Dutch art pursuit of depicting the “beauty” in the religious ideas of the sublime, to describe the ordinary and simple in real life, get a kind of heart release from depression. Because of the Calvinism [2]. Calvinism opposed the use of paintings and sculptures to provide worship for the saints of the church, and also opposed the blind worship of the church. The Catholic indulgences stipulate that believers will be saved from their sins as long as they make a pilgrimage to Rome within a year designated by the Holy See and pay money for the various ceremonies of the church, and because the Catholic Church collects a lot of money from ordinary parishioners, people’s poor life has not improved, and people begin to fall into contemplation, and gradually understand that this behavior is a deception to the faithful. The Calvinists advocated the reality and simple atmosphere of Dutch painting, and in the middle of the 16th century, under the influence of the Protestant spirit in large areas of Europe, by the Calvinism penetrated into the northern provinces of the Netherlands and was accepted by the people of the time. People’s thinking has been progressed, in the long-term oppression of the awakening, began to pay attention to people’s lives and things full of true feelings, it can be seen that the purpose of Dutch art is no longer limited to the fantasy virtual world and deliberate beautification of reality, but to express a sense of closeness to people in the picture, making the picture more vivid, each work has a reflection of the real soul, the people’s ideal is what the painters pursue. The artistic concept of the Dutch painters of the 17th century clearly expressed the reality of the natural world, whether it was the cities, markets, churches and thousands of natural

scenery where people lived at that time, there was no deliberate decoration, but let this true emotion be truly revealed through painting. Thus, 17th century Dutch painting is a true embodiment of all that is life, echoing the famous Dutch proverb: “God created the world, and the Dutch created Holland.” The realm of Dutch painting art in the 17th century covered the whole society, nature and life, and everyone could find their own spiritual home in painting. The Dutch love for reality penetrates into the spirit of every Dutchman, just like a happy Dutchman facing his family, from the painting we will experience its unique and true temperament, it is this love that can express the popular aesthetic taste of Dutch painting art in the 17th century reflected in people’s hearts, and at the same time it is expressed in the artist’s popular and natural creation. The Dutch despised the excessive ostentation, So collectors tend to prefer small works with dark colors such as portraits, still life, genre painting, landscape painting and so on. With the Italian baroque pursuit of dazzling, luxuriant effect of large zenith frescoes and interior decoration is in stark contrast [3]. Dutch genre paintings represent national characteristics and promote simple and pragmatic ideas. Influence those believers who support religion for life and the artists who insist on using religious themes.

3 A Study of Dutch Genre Paintings

3.1 The Dutch Genre Painting Art Characteristics and Citizen Subject Research

3.1.1 The Dutch Genre Painting Art Characteristics

Genre painting is the history of painting is one of the unique style of painting, genre painting avoids the themes of idealism and hedonism, and the artistic and aesthetic taste changes from catering to the needs of the old aristocracy to the needs of the bourgeois. The Dutch genre painting originally referred to the size of the painting, is their “little masterpiece”, and through the transition to the painting the artist, They are the master, “the great master,” painting in the “little”, the Dutchman is a frank people, a simple people, when the original characteristics of nationalism the secularization tendency of Calvinism combination, formed the pragmatic spirit and pragmatic atmosphere of Dutch culture. The Dutch pay attention to personal moral cultivation, and their folk customs are very simple and rigorous. People like the harmony of the picture and the poetic atmosphere of the scene, do not like too mystical and religious things, those who express the human body as the mainstay, erotic, naked, full of temptation is difficult to accept in the eyes of the Dutch, the Dutch are very loyal to the family, the behavior of extramarital affairs are deeply hated. Men believe that it does not matter whether a wife is beautiful or not, they believe that a woman is strong and productive, and that loyalty to her husband is what Dutch men expect. And women are deeply aware of their responsibility to devote themselves to their husbands and children, and they keep the housework in order. This situation is also reflected in the painter’s work, where genre paintings often see busy women, happy scenes of family gatherings, and the willingness of the Dutch to give all their love in such a family atmosphere, which is also presented in their works. Works style characteristics usually use realistic techniques and common scenes in daily life, under the impetus of the pragmatic and simple spirit, different classes of the Netherlands will accept this style characteristics, and in a new form to the public and

later generations to appreciate, it will also become belong to their unique artistic style characteristics. Life as the subject of Dutch genre painting, the citizens are exactly the real reaction to life, encouraging people to find happiness in simple secular life. Hegel in his book "Aesthetics" believes that in terms of engraving, drama and epic, the "ideal art" expresses Greece, and in terms of painting, the "ideal art" belongs neither to Greece nor to Italy, and Dutch painting in the 17th century achieved a breakthrough stage in the development of painting, and he is also the turning point and the highest stage in the development of painting, because Dutch painting is a Dutch artist who treats the subject of daily life with real feelings, and is no longer the theme of praising the Holy See, Dutch painting depicts the current era of Dutch society with a more macroscopic era narrative with a calm devotion to life. Western genre painting has a long history, the earliest ancient Egyptian murals and Indian cave paintings appeared similar depictions of people's daily life scenes works, ancient Greece and ancient Rome period believed that the style of genre painting was not elegant enough, but Dutch genre painting took this unpopular style to the extreme, not only the symbol of the Dutch era, but also opened up a new field of painting art, played a driving role in the development of painting history, Dutch genre paintings are mostly based on family life, banquets, loans, taverns, treatment and other subjects, Their subjects are all extracted from any large and small thing in the life of citizens, but what is striking is that they are the most ordinary scenes of ordinary daily life, and they are all subjects belonging to the citizens of the Netherlands in the 17th century. In Dutch genre painting, painters at that time often looked through the perspective of a snap shot, as if the character is unaware of the activity, rather than the intentional pose we pose for taking pictures today, and this instant scene captures, although Dutch genre paintings depict real life, it is not difficult to find the deeper hidden meaning behind their works, that is, they will feel the meaning of admonition, although Dutch genre paintings do not praise religion, but the picture reveals the ideological concept of advocating morality, However, Dutch genre painting is expressed in the works through the feelings of the painter's era, in order to combine the real emotions of the painter and the aesthetic needs of the public to create a new situation in painting, and to achieve the transcendence of morality. Dutch painting from the 17th century reveals scenes of urbanized life and Dutch happiness. Simple and plain way of life is the most beautiful artistic conception, it did not require material on the costly hedonism and harsh repression of religion, so that the pursuit of true feelings is the Dutch in the 17th century genre painting development an important factor to the top.

3.1.2 Analysis of Works on the Theme of Dutch Citizen Life

Genre painting is reflected in the 17th century Dutch painting and citizen life closely related the most powerful evidence. The characteristics of the genre is abandoned the noble aesthetic, no longer rely on the support of the aristocracy and the court, turned to the civilian aesthetic. These works often show the atmosphere of ordinary family life, industrious and honest servants, dressing women or do slight housework, these subjects are small, but suitable for hanging in the home decoration, they are in the public aesthetic taste, we draw from the Dutch genre of the representative figures and their representative work can see. The representative figures of the Dutch genre painting style are Johannes Vermeer, Adriaen van Ostade, and Jan Steen. They are based on real life, social customs,

mediocre daily descriptions. In their work content is normal on the surface, and 17th century Dutch genre painter is often referred to as the “master”, each genre painting artists are the treasures of The Times.

Adriaen van Ostade, live in 1610 to 1685, the Dutch genre painter, his handling of the theme of life is not so noisy, but have a kind of farmers as rude kind and simple sense of humor. Hegel’s speech in his aesthetics of Dutch genre had a detailed discussion, in his view: “Although this painting originated from folk culture, rude, and ordinary things is not important in the accidental nature, the scene is saturated with a freely happy lively atmosphere, to form a real subject matter content is not the ordinary folk culture, but this kind of unrestrained happy atmosphere. So we see It is not the ordinary emotions and lust, but the simplicity of the lower class of life Close to the nature of things, It’s cheerful comedy stuff [4]”. This is also the highlight of his work. His oil paintings are heavy and simple, but not vulgar. Johannes Vermeer, also called “Johannes Vermeer van Delft”, lived from 1632 to 1675. His life was uneventful [5]. Vermeer’s work has several characteristics, most of his works appear in the side view of women’s image, or describe a comfortable family life, like to depict the citizens of housework, as if is the family atmosphere of that era, in the realistic portrayal of life. There are a lot of classics of Vermeer, one of the painting “the love letter” (1667–1670) in the scene depicts the citizens family housewife is sitting in the living room to play the piano, her maid brought a letter from housewife looking forward to for a long time. This is Vermeer’s typical painting of the boudoir in a woman’s life. in his works, all things are pure, this is a feature of life at that time, when the Vermeer’s hometown is “Delft”, it is famous for its pure city, however, such a pure life provides artists with unique style, his works depict the citizens have a pure, simple features. One of the greatest masters of the Dutch school is Jan Steen (1626–1679) [6], he registered as a master in the painters’ guild in Leiden on march 18, 1648 [7]. Considered a “highly folded artist, not adhering to a consistent style, technique, or a type of theme” [8]. He describes the life of the peasants and the middle class in different styles, among which the banquet works are the most vivid and complete. The most common and distinctive paintings are the noise, food, and drinking of Dutch families, which are often called “Steen’s family noise” today. His work is full of bright colors and a sense of humor, showing the painter’s psychological insight into the characters. In his work “the happy family” (1668), depict messy happy household in the living room, in the joy of the family at night drinking pleasure, images of adult and child messy, turned upside down. The expression of warm light atmosphere and rich movement in the work. But this kind of feeling not Caravaggio style. There is no theme of religious form, but a true expression of life. From the atmosphere of the work as if we really come to citizens held a family party, each of them is full of smile on the face, they are immersed in this moment. The atmosphere of their appeal the audience’s attention.

4 Conclusions

17th-century Dutch people liberated from religious suppression over a long period of time to come out. The original democratic foundation of the Netherlands met with the secular culture of Calvinism, and the two cultures combined with each other to form the pragmatic spiritual culture of the Dutch, and the moral and spiritual culture of the

Dutch has been further sublimated, which correspondingly makes the painter's artistic style more distinctive. Their painting style from religious belief to the depiction of the secular, so this theme is through the 17th century Dutch genre paintings and an analysis of the theme of civic life, combined with the Dutch social background to analyze the 17th century European art and genre painting, and through the Dutch genre painting masters, such as Johannes Vermeer, Adriaen van Ostade, Jan Steen, from their works to analyze the characteristics of the Dutch genre painting of the civic life themes.

Acknowledgements. The authors gratefully acknowledge the data support from University of Science Malaysia.

References

1. A. K. Ho, *Creating Distinctions in Dutch Genre Painting: Repetition and Invention*. Amsterdam University Press, 2017. Accessed: Oct. 22, 2022. [Online]. Available: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1v2xsvq>
2. F. S. Fred and J. Li, *A General History of Gardner Art = Gardner's art through the ages / Jia de na yi shu tong shi = Gardner's art through the ages*. Hunan Fine Arts Press, Zhangsha: Hu Nan Mei Shu Chu Ban She, 2013, p. 613.
3. F. S. Fred and J. Li, *A General History of Gardner Art = Gardner's art through the ages / Jia de na yi shu tong shi = Gardner's art through the ages*. Hunan Fine Arts Press, Zhangsha: Hu Nan Mei Shu Chu Ban She, 2013, p. 609.
4. Hegel, *Aesthetics (Volume 3,1)*. The Commercial Press Subtitle: *Aesthetics*, 1979. Accessed: Oct. 22, 2022.
5. "Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675)," [www.historyofholland.com](http://www.historyofholland.com/johannes-vermeer-(1632-1675).html). [http://www.historyofholland.com/johannes-vermeer-\(1632-1675\).html](http://www.historyofholland.com/johannes-vermeer-(1632-1675).html)
6. "Jan Steen (1626–1679)," [www.historyofholland.com](http://www.historyofholland.com/jan-steen-(1626-1679).html). [http://www.historyofholland.com/jan-steen-\(1626-1679\).html](http://www.historyofholland.com/jan-steen-(1626-1679).html) (accessed Oct. 22, 2022).
7. W. A. Liedtke, Michiel C Plomp, Kunsthistoriker, Reinier Baarsen, and A. New, *Vermeer and the Delft School*. New York: Metropolitan Museum Of Art, 2001.
8. J. Aono and A. Waiboer, "Review of Gabriel Metsu (1629–1667): Life and Work – Catalogue Raisonné," *Oud Holland*, vol. 129, no. 1, pp. 37–45, 2016, Accessed: Oct. 22, 2022. [Online]. Available: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24766257>.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

