



Dialogism in the Works of Hao Liang

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Abstract. From a dialogue perspective in literary theory, this article analyzes the relationship between ancient and modern, East and West, and material and spiritual reflected in the works of Hao Liang. It first introduces the dialogue theory proposed by literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, and analyzes Hao Liang's works from three aspects: the subjects in his paintings, text and image, and the ideas and concepts. The study aims to explore pictoriality and contemporaneity in his works.

Keywords: Hao Liang, Dialogism, Contemporary, Pictoriality

1 Introduction

Postmodernism arose in the West in the 20th century, deeply influenced by Nietzsche and Freud. It embodies skepticism and rebellion against contemporary society and critically deconstructs the ways of thinking prevalent in the process of modernization. Postmodernism pursues freedom and diversification, advocates inclusivity, reveres irrationality and difference. In the early 1980s, the Western trend of postmodernism entered China. After experiencing long-term limitation of socialist realism creation, Chinese art creation began to move towards expressing metaphysical ideas. Artists began to discuss philosophical, religious, and other issues, and the ideas expressed in their artworks shifted from pursuing unity with reality to transcending reality. As Chinese scholar Lü Peng said, "In the last twenty years of the last century, Chinese artists began to use words such as skepticism, criticism, self-expression, and deconstruction. Western values helped them liberate their thinking and gain freedom in their inner world." Postmodernism first influenced the fields of architecture and landscape, followed by literature, photography, and painting.

In the field of painting, due to the great changes in social environment and the richness brought by the postmodernism trend, a new style of meticulous painting emerged. New meticulous painting artists process and utilize image information, grounded in the present context, applying rhetorical devices such as metaphor, symbol, and allegory to elements and images intimately related to their own experiences. Its idea, the new literati consciousness, originates from the artists' self-awareness and reflects their unique thoughts on life, existence, and personal values. While other new meticulous artists are committed to innovation, breaking the boundaries of traditional painting in terms of techniques, materials, painting subjects, composition, color, and thought, Hao Liang is

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undoubtedly one of the outstanding artists wandering in tradition and possessing this consciousness.

Hao Liang's uniqueness lies in his self-proclaimed identity as "backward-looking" artist. He is the continuation of the ancient literati's mind and temperament. He specializes in using Chinese traditional meticulous painting techniques such as the Bochen School's painting method and the "Gaoyuan", "Pingyuan" and "Shenyuan" painting techniques in landscape painting. He interweaves elements from ancient texts, illustrated books, relics, and ideas to create contemporary works. Hao Liang's works develop in the relationship between ancient and modern, East and West, limited and unlimited, material and spiritual. This inspires us to think about the dialogical nature of the paintings.

Dialogism refers to the existence of two or more interacting voices in verbal or written discourse, expressing relationships such as agreement and disagreement, affirmation and negation. The Soviet literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin proposed the theory of dialogue, in which he believed that difference is a necessity for dialogue to continue. The study of dialogic theory is primarily applied in literature, philosophy, and film. From ancient Greece, the presence of dialogue has had a profound influence on the emergence and depth of Western philosophy. From Socratic dialogic philosophy to absurd realism in films and plays such as *Waiting for Godot* and *Coffee and Cigarettes*, dialogue always plays a pivotal role. It can lead to the birth of new ideas, and even within the dialogic relationship, it can provoke new lines of thought. This paper discusses the relationship presented in Hao's works from both material and spiritual aspects respectively, and explores the dialogic nature presented in his works by analyzing its ideas and content.

2 Literature review

The literati is a social identity with a strong ideological consciousness rooted in ancient China that refers to educated and intelligent people. The new literati consciousness emerged after the rise of postmodernism, demonstrating contemporary Chinese artists' exploration of their own existence, life, death, and other concepts. In this stance, new literati consciousness reexamines and activates tradition [3][9].

Hao Liang's works are based on a novel way of thinking, reflecting his contemplation of life and death. Some of his works employ the painting methods of the Bochen School. He draws on the Western oil painting technique of creating a three-dimensional visual effect through embossing, while also inheriting the ink structure and haloing of ancient figure paintings, as if capturing reflections in a mirror. His painting style not only absorbs the traditional skills of folk portraiture, but also merges with the aesthetic orientation of literati painting, resulting in works that combine literary and artistic qualities. He has a deep study of Chinese ancient metaphysics. He is dedicated to studying the ideas in Chinese Taoism, and in many of his works, he exhibits his exploration of the relationship between humans and nature. He also studied the academic methods of the late Ming Dynasty. Wang Shizhen's retro theory provides a basis for Hao Liang's creation, as he seeks to find a balance between retro and innovation. Textual research

is one of his working methods [2]. Hao Liang enjoys studying ancient poems, for instance, in his series “*The Poetry of Li Shangyin*” where he bases his paintings on texts. He traces history and repeatedly depict historical events: what remains constant might be the intent of the poem, yet what changes is the differing feelings the artist presents through imagery. Hao Liang has been seeking a balance between tradition and modernity, East and West, ancient and contemporary cultures, and internal and external reality [1]. Inspired by Bakhtin’s “Bakhtin Dialogue Theory” [6], I regard this balance and struggle between differences as a dialogic relationship in literary language, in which “difference is a necessity for dialogue to continue” is the theoretical basis of this paper. Most analyses of Hao Liang’s works focus on the new literati consciousness and painting techniques, lacking textual research, which motivates this study to explore his works from a dialogic perspective. As Meng interpreted the concept of intertextuality: Any text is an intertext [5]. This paper aims to discuss the pictoriality in painting works from a literary and linguistic perspective.

3 Method

3.1 Dialogue between the subjects of the paintings

In Hao Liang’s works, there is a significant number of repainted ancient paintings that highlight the differences and similarities between his thinking and that of the ancients. His works display a great deal of interplay between time and space. Although these works are reinterpretations of ancient imagery and the continuation and inheritance of landscape painting techniques from the Northern Song Dynasty, they contain contemporary reflections.

Hao Liang’s works feature with established symbols and he juxtaposes these symbols together. When viewers look at his works, they are not only concerned with the thematic interpretation brought by a single symbol, but also involuntarily contemplate the relationships between them. For example, in his repainted version of the “Eight Views of Xiaoxiang”, Hao Liang explores the theme from eight different perspectives: “transience”, “universalisation”, “relics”, “limplight”, “snow”, “the world”, “the scholarly journey”, and “the reclining journey”. Hao Liang said, “The space I want to paint is different from the displayed space[4]. You will see this as a landscape of a plain, that bamboo, it couldn’t possibly be this big in reality.” He blurred the proportions of real space and the existence of time, prompting viewers to contemplate where and when they are. As viewers observing these works as “outsiders”, this is precisely a response to contemporary existential philosophy. This series of works not only depict Chinese landscapes, but also include the appearance of multiple countries, including China, Japan, and Korea. It delineates a diversified landscape through continuous reconstruction and interpretation[7]. He has been searching for a connection between contemporary and ancient traditions, attempting to blur the boundaries between time, space, and perception in his works. His paintings contain the alternation of seasons and the cycle of life and death, and his technique combines both three-dimensional and two-dimensional elements, juxtaposing the “Gaoyuan”, “Pingyuan” and “Shenyuan” painting techniques of the Northern Song mountains and rivers in the same picture. In other words, Hao

Liang places landscapes and objects from different perspectives within the same frame, disrupting the overall unity and centrality of the painting. This demonstrates the direct influence of postmodernism on Hao's composition[8].

Hao Liang is skilled in using shading relationships to guide viewers into the worldview he constructs. For example, in one of his "Eight Views of Xiaoxiang" series, "remains" he juxtaposes ancient painting of mountain and river relics with the image of a newly discovered red dwarf star from NASA. In his view, although there is a chronological order to their discovery, they are both parts of the same universe, prompting people to contemplate the dialectical relationship between materialism and consciousness. Hao Liang places the planet in the background of the picture, surrounded and obscured by the painting mountain and river, emphasizing a spiritual humanism - the idea that metaphysical thoughts envelop the material world. He reinterprets the "Eight Views of Xiaoxiang" on a large scale, completely separating it from history, expressing a sense of time and flow in the picture, and exploring the connections between different time and space, cultures, and circumstances. Hao Liang arranges entities of different sizes, times, and spaces together, creating a confusion between time, space, location, illusion, and reality[10]. The silent communication between these objects is engaged in a living dialogue.

3.2 Dialogue between text and picture

Hao Liang has a deep interest in ancient Chinese poetry and music. Many of his works are based on ancient poetry, which he reconstructs through painting, and the poetry and artwork permeate and intertwine with each other to form a new text. Similar to Derrida's point of view, every text or discourse is an interweaving of signs, and the signification of these signs is determined from the perspective of intertextuality by other discourses. Hao Liang's works are not just simple textual explanations, but a double painting composed of both the artwork and text, creating a unified conflict and harmony, movement and stillness[11] [12].

In his work "The Poetry of Li Shangyin II", Hao Liang created a thematic work using ancient poetry texts. Hao's painting is not simply a reproduction of the text or an illustration, but rather a representation of his understanding of the poetic imagery. It is a complementary interpretation of ancient poetry, where the poem and the painting interpret each other as texts[13]. Hao Liang's painting changes the reader's predetermined reading order of the poem. What people see is no longer the imagery generated by the fixed sequence of words, but the overall artistic conception obtained through subjective viewing.

Hao Liang also discusses some transcendental inspirations through painting. Inspired by the form of "The Goldberg Variations", Hao Liang depicted the different sides of a group of plants next to his studio, using a non-anthropocentric perspective to demonstrate the idea of animism and express his views on the ancient Chinese historical story - "The Marriage of The River God". He believes that events occurring simultaneously from different angles exist on the different sides of the same group of plants, and they coordinate with each other at the same moment, representing a balance between imagination and reason.

Hao's use of the text interprets Derrida's thinking on the text: the text itself is an unstable and infinite process of intertextual variation that never ceases. The resonance between the artistic conception brought by the text and the painting is a fusion of feelings and a new birth of language.

3.3 Dialogue between ideas and concepts

Bakhtin believed that language has its sociality, and dialogues have a non-completed nature [6]. In this case, meanings present a constantly updating feature. He pointed out that even the meanings generated in dialogues of past centuries are never fixed. They always update as dialogues further develop. The concept of painting is a kind of textual language. Hao Liang allows the ideas and concepts of artists from different periods and cultural backgrounds to dialogue in his works.

In Hao Liang's work "Streams and Mountains Without End", he combines Dong Qichang's literati painting theory with the artistic spirit of contemporary artist Kandinsky, mixing rationality with sensibility. Dong Qichang transformed the elements of dots, lines, and planes that express the form of the painting into concrete content, which visually added abstractness. Kandinsky, however, abstracted concrete content into simple dots, lines, and planes. This contradictory thought and visual effect are ultimately balanced in Hao's paintings[14]. At the beginning of the painting "Streams and Mountains Without End", on the right side is a human looking up at the near landscape, in the middle is a person looking at the front landscape, and on the left side of the painting is a person looking down at the distant landscape. Hao Liang depicts the mental states of these people when viewing the landscape from different perspectives, while the viewer experiences the landscape from a God's-eye view. The collision of ancient and modern painting concepts creates a new dialogue in his works. They intertwine with each other that erupt new connections in contemporary society.

4 Conclusion

To some extent, Hao Liang is a wanderer. This idea derives from the French philosopher Deleuze's nomadic thinking and the Chinese scholar Wang Zhihe's wandering thought. A wanderer is a person who never stops and is never satisfied in the process of constant exploring and experiencing, but also a person who constantly searches for himself and tries to practice his own ideas[6].

Drawing on the dialogic perspective that exists in literary and language research, this study analyzes the relationship between the ancient and the modern, the East and the West, and the material and the spiritual in Hao Liang's works from three angles: the subjects of the painting, text and image, and ideas and concepts. Literary art possesses an imaginative indirectness that requires a visual imagination and an emotional response from the viewer. Whether it is the depiction of people, objects, landscapes, psychological states, or external descriptions, there needs to be a common moment, where the viewer and the creator achieve a state of resonance[8]. Maugham wrote in *Cakes and Ale*: "The highest form of literature is poetry." Therefore, much of the discussion

of the relationship between literature and painting from ancient times to the present is through the relationship between poetry and painting. It is evident that literature possesses the beauty of painting. Conversely, painting also possesses literary beauty. The languages of painting and literature are interconnected, that is, paintings can be analyzed from the perspective of literary rhetorical devices. This approach needs to be more widely applied in future art research.

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