

# Image Thinking and Modeling of Chinese Painting

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**Abstract:** As the essence of Chinese traditional culture, Chinese painting is distinguished from other paintings by its unique art form and expression technique. Among them, image thinking and image modeling are the soul of Chinese painting, which is an important way to express the artist's unique feelings and thoughts, and also the source of the unique charm of Chinese paintings. Therefore, this paper mainly explores the image thinking and modeling of Chinese painting, and its importance, and analyzes the application of image thinking and modeling in Chinese painting.

**Keywords:** Chinese painting; Image thinking; Image modeling; Use skills

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## 1. Introduction

The image thinking of Chinese painting emphasizes the perception and understanding of things. The artist forms a unique way of perception through observing the natural and human landscape and studying culture, history, philosophy, and other aspects, They translate what they see and hear into their own artistic language through perception rather than direct imitation. This kind of image thinking is not only reflected in the theme and image of the work, but also reflected in the composition, color, brushstrokes, and ink <sup>[1]</sup>.

Another important characteristic of image thinking is the expression beyond time and space. Chinese painting artists often combine the real world with the imaginary world through allegorical and symbolic techniques to create artistic images that transcend time and space. Their image-based way of expression makes their works visually appealing and intellectually stimulating <sup>[2]</sup>.

Intentional modeling is another important technique of Chinese painting artists <sup>[3]</sup>. Intentional modeling emphasizes the artist's subjective expression and aesthetic intention of things. Through the use of paintbrushes and ink and the layout of composition, the artist integrates his emotions and subjective feelings into his works. This individualized way of expression makes each work unique in terms of artistic style and personality <sup>[4]</sup>.

Intentional modeling also emphasizes the artist's creation and representation of images. Chinese painting artists often create unique images through the use of paintbrushes and ink and the construction of images <sup>[5]</sup>. Guided by intention, they transform objective things into their own artistic images through the flexible use

of paintbrushes and ink and the change of images. This kind of creative intention modeling makes Chinese painting have distinct artistic characteristics and unique aesthetic value <sup>[6]</sup>.

## **2. Importance of image thinking and image modeling and their status in Chinese painting**

The concept of image thinking and modeling in Chinese painting refers to the artist's utilization of subjective imagination and emotions to depict the form and vitality of objective subjects during the creative process. This approach highlights the fusion of "meaning" and "image," emphasizing the pursuit of harmony between the artistic conception and expressive form of the painting. In Chinese painting, image thinking and modeling are crucial elements that determine the aesthetic value and artistic charm of the picture. Image thinking and modeling contribute to the distinctive artistic style of Chinese painting. Chinese painting places a strong emphasis on "artistic conception," prioritizing the portrayal of the inner spirit and emotion of the subject rather than merely depicting its external appearance. This unique artistic style is achieved through the application of image thinking and modeling techniques. Furthermore, image thinking and modeling imbue Chinese painting with profound connotations and implications. Chinese painters strive to imbue their artworks with deep artistic conceptions and rich meanings. By employing image thinking and modeling, paintings attain heightened symbolism and significance, allowing them to convey profound philosophical and ideological ideas <sup>[7]</sup>.

## **3. Image thinking of Chinese painting and the use of image modeling skills**

### **3.1. Image thinking of Chinese painting**

Image modeling is constructed through image thinking, which is conveyed through lines, ink color, and space <sup>[8]</sup>. Lines are an important means of expression in Chinese paintings, involving the change of thickness, shade, curvature, and so on. "Flying white" can be used to express a sense of change and flow, while "solid" lines can be used to express stability, and different line features can convey different image characteristics <sup>[9]</sup>. In Chinese painting, ink serves as a vital medium of expression, capturing the texture and dimensions of objects through variations in depth, shading, and the use of dry and wet techniques. The application of ink can range from soft rendering to dry brush outlining, allowing artists to shape the form and texture of the image by altering the ink color. Spatial layout is another critical aspect of Chinese painting, involving the strategic arrangement of scenes to achieve an appealing composition. Common spatial layouts include the "central subject," "center of gravity shift," and "front and back scattered." These layout methods contribute to creating harmonious, hierarchical compositions that enhance the expression of the image. For example, in the painting *Five Cows*, the five cows are depicted side by side, deviating from conventional spatial arrangements. Despite this departure from objective reality, the arrangement effectively conveys the expressions of the cows and embodies artistic conception. Through this juxtaposition, the painter emphasizes the strength and stability of the cows while also evoking a sense of unrestrained heroism. This technique, known as "juxtaposition" in Chinese painting, exemplifies a unique approach to constructing image modeling <sup>[10]</sup>.

### **3.2. Constructing images through "forms"**

In Chinese paintings, the artist builds image modeling by interpreting an object in his/her own way <sup>[11]</sup>. The image in the painting is not only the image expression of things in the real world but also the concrete embodiment of the creator's thoughts and feelings <sup>[12]</sup>. For example, in Qi Baishi's work *Chicken*, he refines and exaggerates the shape and posture of the chicken through his interpretation of a chicken, showing the

vividness and vivacity of the chicken. The expression and breathing of the chicken are detailed through his painting, creating a unique image of the chicken with his unique style <sup>[13]</sup>. In Wu Changshuo's painting of a peony, he refines and exaggerates the form and color of the peony, portraying a majestic and graceful peony. He meticulously considers the posture and vitality of the peony flowers, using pen and ink techniques and thoughtful composition arrangements to create a unique image of the peony. Through his artistic expression, Wu Changshuo communicates his personal fascination and aesthetic appreciation for the peony. This highlights a fundamental aspect of Chinese painting creation: painters must continuously examine, observe, and appreciate their subjects. By integrating their own emotions and perceptions with external objects, they can achieve effective image modeling and convey their individual sentiments <sup>[14]</sup>.

### **3.3. Empathizing with the image**

To better utilize image thinking and modeling in Chinese painting creation, artists can achieve this by empathizing with their subjects. This involves grasping the spiritual essence of nature through in-depth observation, feeling the subtleties of natural phenomena like the movement of flowers and leaves in the wind, birds drinking or pecking, and the ever-changing landscape. By integrating their emotions into their subjects, artists imbue them with spiritual characteristics. For example, in Xu Beihong's *Li River Spring Rain Map* <sup>[15]</sup>, he infuses his own emotions into the Li River landscape, vividly capturing the beauty of the scene after rain through delicate brushwork and vibrant colors. Through unique compositions and line outlines, he conveys the emotions of the landscape and objects, enabling viewers to experience the beauty and enchantment of nature. Therefore, to better utilize image thinking and image modeling in Chinese painting, artists need to empathize with objects.

Firstly, artists should observe and experience nature and life deeply, so that they are equipped with ideas for creating new paintings. For example, when creating landscape painting, artists need to fully understand and experience every facet of the landscape, so as to convert them into images and translate them into their paintings <sup>[16]</sup>. Secondly, artists must grasp the characteristics and essence of the subject. Through the process of observing and experiencing nature and life, creators need to understand the inherent qualities and deeper meanings of the subject, integrating them into their artistic renditions. For example, in flower-and-bird paintings, artists must grasp the nuances of the flowers' shapes, colors, and vitality, allowing them to infuse their own emotions and thoughts into the depiction of the flora and fauna. Finally, artists must integrate their own emotions and thoughts into the image. Once they have grasped the essence of the subject, creators should imbue the image with their personal emotions and thoughts. For instance, in figure painting, artists can convey the inner feelings and thoughts of the subjects through their expressions, movements, and attire. This fusion of emotion and imagery contributes to the formation and continual improvement of image modeling in Chinese painting <sup>[17]</sup>.

## **4. Development trend of image thinking and modeling in Chinese painting**

### **4.1. Content innovation**

Image thinking and modeling are often applied to landscape, flower, and bird paintings, reflecting the spiritual connotation of traditional Chinese culture. However, with the development of society and the diversification of culture, artists can try to integrate more themes and elements into Chinese painting, especially involving characters, urban landscapes, contemporary social issues, etc., to make Chinese painting more diversified. Chinese painting can also be innovative by re-interpreting and re-creating traditional themes. By re-examining traditional themes, artists can express and interpret them from different angles, which brings a breath of fresh air to traditional paintings. For example, artists can re-compose and express traditional landscape paintings by

adding modern ideas to the interpretation. The essence of image thinking and modeling in Chinese painting lies in the expression of artistic conception and meaning. Artists should prioritize personal feelings and expressions, infusing their works with unique and emotional characteristics. By doing so, artworks become more personalized and resonant with viewers. Moreover, artists can incorporate modern social elements to infuse their works with a contemporary and innovative touch <sup>[18]</sup>.

## **4.2. Innovation of materials and techniques**

In recent years, with the continuous progress of science and technology and the continuous exploration by artists, many new materials and techniques for Chinese painting have emerged. Traditional Chinese painting mainly uses materials such as paper, ink, paintbrush, and pigment. With the introduction of Western painting and the discovery of various chemicals, modern artists can use more non-traditional materials, such as acrylic, oil paints, watercolors, etc., or combine traditional materials with modern materials to create more diversified effects in their paintings. The innovation of this material not only broadens the means of expression of Chinese painting but also provides artists more room for creativity. New materials such as metal, plastic, and electronic elements can also be added to create more novel Chinese paintings. The traditional techniques of Chinese painting include ink painting, wet brush, dry brush, freehand brushwork, fine brushwork, etc. With the introduction of Western painting techniques, modern artists can also try to integrate Western painting techniques and Chinese painting techniques to create unique styles and forms of expression. For example, artists can combine the freehand techniques of Chinese painting with Western oil painting to create more layers. Alternatively, they can draw inspiration from ancient Greek black pottery painting, employing simple lines and color schemes to depict modern social life. Moreover, artists may explore Western styles such as Romanesque or Byzantine, or draw from religious painting forms, innovating upon traditional Chinese painting techniques. Furthermore, the evolution of digital technology has introduced new creative tools, enabling artists to experiment with digital painting software and diversify their modes of expression even further <sup>[19]</sup>.

## **4.3. Form innovation under cross-border cooperation**

In recent years, the development of the concept of cross-border cooperation has also provided new ideas for the innovation of image thinking and modeling of Chinese painting. Artists are leveraging cross-disciplinary collaborations with music, dance, drama, and other art forms to craft more personalized and unique works. As China increasingly emphasizes its rich traditional culture, Chinese painting artists are collaborating with scholars and practitioners in Chinese opera, classical music, and other cultural domains. By delving into the characteristics and nuances of Chinese opera performance styles such as Peking Opera and Henan opera, artists can seamlessly integrate them into their paintings, showcasing the character imagery, artistic style, and color elements of Chinese opera art. Furthermore, collaborations with various ethnic groups' artistic elements, such as ethnic dance and music, offer avenues for innovation. By exploring the development history and expressive forms of different ethnic dance and music traditions in China, artists can infuse their paintings with fresh perspectives and cultural richness. Moreover, Chinese painting can draw inspiration and innovative techniques from diverse fields, including modern science and technology, contemporary architectural styles, and fashion elements. For instance, artists can blend the geometric shapes and abstract characteristics of modern architecture with traditional Chinese painting elements, breaking free from traditional constraints and presenting a unique artistic style. By engaging in collaborations across these fields, Chinese painting not only gains access to new materials, techniques, and creative insights but also expands its artistic repertoire and expressive potential.



## 5. Conclusion

As the core features of Chinese painting, image thinking and modeling embody the profound heritage of Chinese culture and its unique aesthetic. Through the use of these techniques, Chinese painters can better express the beauty of nature, convey their feelings, and express their understanding of the world. These techniques not only showcase the unique charm of Chinese painting but also contribute significantly to the world of art. Indeed, innovation plays a crucial role in the sustainable development and inheritance of art forms, injecting freshness and surprise into the audience experience while enriching the expressive potential of art. Therefore, Chinese painting should embrace continuous innovation across various elements such as content, form, materials, and techniques in tandem with the changing times. By integrating traditional themes with modern elements, Chinese painting can forge a new art form that remains relevant to contemporary audiences while preserving its core essence. This approach not only ensures that Chinese painting evolves with the times but also fosters its sustainable development and continued vitality.

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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