

The Ideal Beauty of Flower and Bird Paintings in the Song Dynasty: Aesthetic Expression from the Perspective of Cultural Integration

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Abstract: This paper explores the aesthetic expression and idealized characteristics of Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings in the context of cultural integration. At present, there is a problem in the study of flower and bird paintings that its cultural background, aesthetic connotation and technical inheritance have not been fully integrated, especially the artistic expression and concept under the influence of different cultural integration have not been systematically analyzed. This paper aims to reveal how the ideal beauty of flower and bird paintings in the Song Dynasty was formed in cultural exchanges from a cross-cultural perspective, and to explore the aesthetic concepts and artistic innovations behind it. The research methods include literature analysis, image analysis and comparative study. The specific steps are: the first is to review the social background and cultural environment of the Song Dynasty, and sort out the trajectory of artistic exchanges between the East and the West; the second is to select typical flower and bird paintings for image analysis, and carefully analyze their aesthetic characteristics from aspects such as form, color, and composition; and finally, through comparison with other cultural and artistic forms of the same period, revealing the relationship between the idealized aesthetics and cultural integration embodied in flower and bird paintings. The research results show that the flower and bird paintings of the Northern and Southern Song Dynasties displayed a highly idealized aesthetic style, especially in the use of color, composition and expression techniques, emphasizing the idealized expression of natural beauty. At the same time, it also incorporated elements of Buddhism, Taoism and Western Regions art, reflecting cultural integration and exchange.

1. Introduction

This paper aims to explore the ideal aesthetics of flower and bird paintings during the Song Dynasty and the cultural integration phenomenon behind it. The Song Dynasty was the golden age of flower and bird painting. Not only did it reach its peak in artistic technique, but it also displayed a unique aesthetic expression under the interweaving of multiple factors such as society, culture, and philosophy. However, current research on Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings mostly

focuses on a single aesthetic expression, technical evolution or cultural background analysis, and few scholars have explored the relationship between cultural integration and idealized aesthetics in its artistic style from a cross-cultural perspective. Therefore, how to understand the ideal aesthetics of Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings and how it formed a unique artistic style under the influence of cultural exchanges between the East and the West is still an important topic worthy of in-depth discussion.

The Song Dynasty was a critical period for cultural exchange between China and the West. Especially driven by the Silk Road and maritime trade, foreign cultures gradually influenced the Chinese art field. Flower and bird painting, an art form, also absorbed elements from the Western Regions and other cultures in this context. These foreign influences are clearly reflected in the style, expression techniques and aesthetic concepts of flower and bird paintings, forming an idealized aesthetic pursuit that not only pursues the harmonious beauty of nature, but also integrates the aesthetic ideas of diverse cultures. Existing research pays little attention to how Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings display this idealized aesthetic connotation in cultural interaction. This paper will re-examine the ideal beauty and cultural integration characteristics in flower and bird paintings from a cross-cultural perspective, combined with the social and historical background and artistic development context of the Song Dynasty, thereby opening up new ideas for the study of Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings and providing a new perspective for broader cultural and artistic research.

This paper first reviews the relevant research on flower and bird paintings in the Northern and Southern Song Dynasties, and then uses three analytical methods to study the evolution of flower and bird painting styles, cultural background, and the influence of Sino-Western cultural exchanges. Then the experimental process and results are discussed, and finally the research results of this paper are summarized and the future research direction is prospected.

2. Related Work

In the context of exploring the ideal beauty of flower and bird paintings in the Northern and Southern Song dynasties and their cultural integration, the research of relevant scholars has provided us with rich perspectives and theoretical support. Yang Q et al. used historical analysis, comparative research and case study methods to explore the relationship between Song Dynasty court paintings and Chinese ceramic art [1]. Vostrikova EA's research identified the historical and cultural background, style evolution and main names of flower and bird painting[2]. Xu L et al.'s research understands the aesthetic expression of Chinese freehand brushwork painting from the perspective of art history, which is conducive to a deeper understanding of freehand brushwork painting[3]. Geng R et al. conducted a study on the comparison and research between the paintings of Lang Shining, a missionary painter in the Qing Dynasty, and the themes of traditional Chinese fine brushwork, and explored the characteristics of Lang Shining's new style of painting and its practical significance to modern Chinese and Western fine brushwork [4]. Ding Y et al.'s study analyzed the formation process of ancient Chinese murals over hundreds of years from the Han Dynasty to the Tang, Song and Yuan Dynasties, and analyzed the image concepts and production techniques of Han Dynasty funeral murals, Tang and Song Dynasty religious Mogao Grottoes, and Tang and Yuan Dynasty funeral murals [5]. Zhang T Y et al.'s study discussed the aesthetic and philosophical theories of this unique visual style by reviewing major ancient Chinese literary works and paintings[6]. The above studies provide rich perspectives on Chinese art, especially flower-and-bird painting, in many aspects, but there are also some shortcomings. Although these studies provide important theoretical support for various fields of Chinese art, there is still room for further improvement in the depth and breadth of interdisciplinary, cross-cultural and comprehensive

research.

3. Methods

3.1. Literature Analysis

This study explored the aesthetic transformation and cultural integration of Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings through literature analysis and a survey of 50 volunteers[7]. The literature analysis reveals the process of the transformation of Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings from realism to idealization, especially how artists endowed flowers and birds with symbolic meanings through natural reproduction to convey personal ideals and philosophical thoughts. At the same time, data show that flower and bird painting creation was influenced by social changes, aristocratic culture, and cultural exchanges between China and the West. In particular, foreign elements from the Silk Road promoted the diversification of styles[8].

The survey results show that 65% of the volunteers believe that Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings are highly symbolic, with plum blossoms and bamboo representing tenacity and purity. 56% of the respondents believe that the works present an idealized aesthetic in terms of composition and color usage, especially the beauty of “white space”, which reflects Confucian philosophy[9]. 48% said that the philosophical thoughts and aesthetic emotions of flower and bird paintings influenced their emotions and brought them a sense of tranquility and comfort. The data show that Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings achieved innovation in cultural integration and formed an ideal aesthetics with profound symbolic meaning and philosophical connotations [10].

3.2. Comparative Research Method

In this study, the comparative research method reveals the similarities and differences in techniques, composition, color and theme expression of flower and bird paintings through a systematic comparison between Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings and other historical periods and regional art forms[11]. To further verify these theoretical viewpoints, the study combined the survey data of 50 volunteers. The survey results showed that 72% of the respondents believed that the colors of Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings were "elegant and symbolic", and 68% of the respondents believed that its composition was simple and philosophical. Most respondents believed that elements such as plum blossoms and bamboo in Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings symbolize an ideal personality of nobleness and seclusion, and this symbolic meaning was recognized by 80% of the respondents.

Compared with Ming Dynasty flower and bird paintings, 65% of the respondents believed that Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings were more idealistic and reflected philosophical ideas, while Ming Dynasty flower and bird paintings tended to be realistic and focused on detail expression[12]. In terms of cross-cultural comparison, 60% of the respondents believed that there were obvious differences in color and composition between Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings and Western Dutch still life paintings. Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings were more concise, elegant, and focused on symbolic expression, while Western still life paintings were brightly colored, with strong contrasts, and paid more attention to the depiction of the material world. In addition, 71% of the respondents believed that cultural exchanges promoted innovations in techniques and colors in Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings, forming a unique artistic style.

Overall, the comparative research method combined with the survey data of 50 volunteers not only reveals the differences between Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings and other historical periods and regional art forms, but also verifies the uniqueness of Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings in color, composition, theme and symbolic expression. The survey results show that the

idealized aesthetics and philosophical expression of Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings have been recognized by most respondents, especially in the context of cultural integration. Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings have demonstrated their unique style through innovative artistic techniques and have formed distinct artistic characteristics under the promotion of Sino-Western cultural exchanges. Table 1 is an analysis table of Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings.

Table 1: Analysis of Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings

Artwork Title	Research Method	Color Types	Composition Type	Symbolic Elements	External Cultural Influence
Li Gonglin "Floral and Feathered Fortune"	Literature Review	5 types	Central Symmetry	Plum Blossom, Bamboo	Silk Road Influence
Zhou Wenju "Cold Plum"	Image Analysis	4 types	Off-Center Symmetry	Plum Blossom, Bamboo	None
Zhao Chang "White Crane"	Comparative Research	6 types	Symmetric or Asymmetric	Crane, Bamboo, Plum Blossom	Western Technique Influence
Tang Bohu "Peony"	Literature Review	8 types	Flowing Composition	Peony, Butterfly	Ming Dynasty Court Influence
Li Gonglin "Autumn Mountain"	Comparative Research	4 types	Rule of Thirds	Pine, Bamboo, Plum Blossom	Silk Road Influence

3.3. Image Research Method

The application of image research method in this study mainly reveals the artistic and cultural connotations behind flower and bird paintings by analyzing the visual elements (such as symbols, composition, color, form, etc.) of flower and bird paintings. After selecting representative Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings, the researchers conducted an in-depth analysis of the symbolic elements in the works, such as common plants such as plum blossoms and bamboo. These elements not only had symbolic meanings in the Song Dynasty (plum blossoms represent tenacity and nobility, bamboo symbolizes integrity, etc.), but also reflected the scholars' pursuit of ideal personality and natural philosophy [13]. By comparing the works of different artists, such as Li Gonglin's *Rich Flowers*, Zhou Wenju's *Cold Plum*, Zhao Chang's *White Crane*, etc., researchers can trace the artistic trajectory of the transformation of Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings from realism to idealization and symbolism, and reveal the innovative changes in composition and color of flower and bird paintings.

In addition, the image research method also helps researchers analyze the integration of Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings in the cultural exchange between China and the West, especially the influence of foreign elements in color and composition[14]. For example, the introduction of perspective and color contrast from Western art promoted the evolution of the style of Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings. In the data analysis, by statistically analyzing the frequency of color use and differences in composition and layout in the works, the researchers were able to specifically demonstrate the style evolution process of Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings. This approach not only reveals the artistic innovation of Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings, but also reflects the shaping and influence of the social, philosophical thoughts and cultural exchanges between China and the West at that time on the ideal aesthetics of flower and bird paintings, thus providing a more comprehensive framework for understanding and helping us grasp

the multiple meanings of flower and bird paintings in the historical and cultural context[15].

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Artistic Style and Cultural Background of Song Dynasty Flower and Bird Paintings

This study uses literature analysis to reveal the process of Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings changing from the realistic style of the Tang Dynasty to the idealized and philosophical style. Artists of the Song Dynasty inherited the natural realism tradition of the Tang Dynasty, incorporated philosophical thinking into composition, brushstrokes and colors, and endowed flower and bird works with more symbolic meanings, such as plum blossoms representing tenacity and bamboo symbolizing integrity. These symbolic elements reflect the noble ideals of aristocratic culture and Confucian philosophical thoughts. The artist expresses the ideal personality and spiritual world through exquisite techniques. The colors of Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings are elegant and natural, reflecting an idealized aesthetic tendency. Combining natural colors with philosophical thoughts, they present an ideal aesthetic that transcends the material world. The following figure is the data obtained through a survey of 100 volunteers. Figure 1 is the survey results of Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings volunteers.

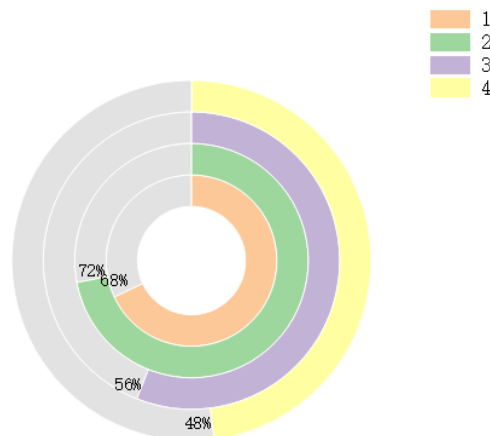


Figure 1: Results of the volunteer survey on Song Dynasty flower and bird painting

The results of a survey of 100 volunteers (full score 100) show that 68% pointed out that the composition is simple and philosophical (1 in the figure), 72% of the respondents believed that plum blossoms and bamboos symbolize tenacity and nobility (2 in the figure), 56% believed that the colors are elegant (3 in the figure), and 48% believed that the combination of natural elements and humanistic ideals bring tranquility and comfort (4 in the figure). The survey results verify the profound influence of Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings on idealized style, cultural connotation and symbolic expression.

4.2. Technological Innovation and Cross-cultural Influence of Song Dynasty Flower and Bird Paintings

Through comparative research, this study reveals the innovation of Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings in terms of techniques, composition and artistic expression. Unlike the Ming Dynasty flower and bird paintings that focused on realism and details, Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings were more idealized, emphasizing symbolism and philosophy. The artist uses simple composition and elegant colors to give symbolic meanings to flowers and birds such as plum

blossoms and bamboo, reflecting the nobleness and integrity in the culture of the aristocracy. The following figure is the scores collected from 100 volunteers. Figure 2 is a comparison between Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings and Western art styles.

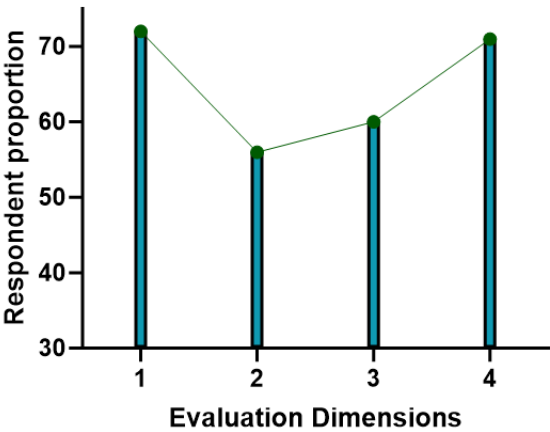


Figure 2: Comparison between Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings and Western art styles

The survey results of 100 volunteers show that 72% believed that Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings are elegant in color and philosophical (1 in the figure), and 56% believed that the composition is simple and symbolic, reflecting an ideal personality (2 in the figure). Compared with the naturalistic art of the Western Renaissance, Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings are simple in color and focus on spirituality, while Western art focuses on bright colors and material reproduction. 60% of the respondents believe that Western art tends to be material, while Song Dynasty art focuses on spiritual expression (3 in the figure). Cultural exchanges between China and the West, especially through the influence of the Silk Road, promoted the innovation of Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings. 71% of the respondents believed that this exchange enriches its style and philosophical connotation (4 in the figure). In summary, Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings shifted between realism and idealization, forming a unique artistic style, which was deeply influenced by aristocratic culture, Confucian philosophy, and the interaction between Chinese and Western cultures.

4.3. Image Analysis Reveals the Symbolic Elements and Artistic Innovation of Song Dynasty Flower and Bird Paintings

Image analysis reveals the innovation of Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings in terms of techniques, formal characteristics and ideological themes through the study of representative works of Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings. For example, Li Gonglin's *Wealthy Flowers*, Zhou Wenju's *Cold Plum Blossoms* and Zhao Chang's *White Crane* use symbolic elements such as plum blossoms and bamboo to demonstrate the Song Dynasty artists' concern for ideal personality, philosophical thoughts and aristocratic culture. These symbols, such as plum blossoms symbolizing tenacity and nobility, and bamboo symbolizing integrity and seclusion, strengthen the philosophical and symbolic characteristics of flower and bird paintings. Image analysis further shows that Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings, while inheriting traditions, innovated their expression techniques, especially in the expression of symbolic themes, formed a unique artistic style, and profoundly reflected the influence of cultural integration. The following is the evaluation data of 50 volunteers on Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings, covering the color usage and composition layout scores (1 to 10 points, 1 is the worst and 10 is the best). Figure 3 is the color usage and composition layout

score chart.

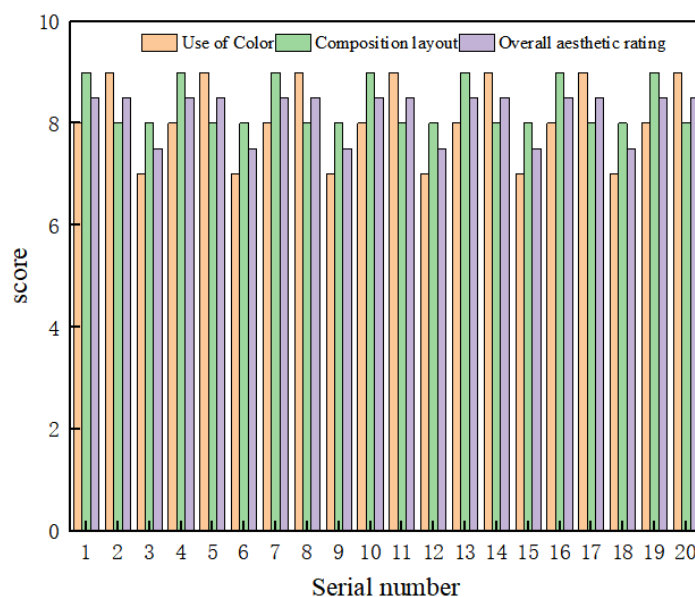


Figure 3: Color usage and composition layout scores

In order to analyze the survey data of 50 volunteers within the framework of image research method, this paper collects data on the aesthetic evaluation of elements such as composition and color in Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings. These data can show the respondents' evaluation of the visual elements of the works and help us reveal the evolution of flower and bird painting styles, cultural background, and the influence of cultural exchanges between China and the West. Color usage refers to whether the color expression in the work conforms to the elegant style of Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings. The higher the score, the more the color conforms to the style. Composition layout refers to whether the composition in the work is simple and conforms to the characteristics of Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings that tend to express ideals.

5. Conclusion

This paper explores the ideal beauty of flower and bird paintings in the context of cultural integration in the Northern and Southern Song Dynasties through historical analysis, comparative research and case study, and reveals the multiple levels of its artistic expression, aesthetic concept and cultural connotation. Research shows that Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings, while inheriting the realistic style of the Tang Dynasty, incorporated idealized and symbolic artistic elements, embodying profound philosophical and cultural symbols. Through comparison with other art forms, especially in the context of the fusion of Chinese and Western cultures, Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings showed innovation in techniques and composition, absorbed foreign elements, and promoted the further development of traditional Chinese art. The case study method reveals the "freehand" spirit and ideal aesthetics of Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings in artistic creation through the analysis of representative works such as Zhao Chang and Li Gonglin. These studies not only broaden the academic vision of flower and bird paintings, but also provide new ideas for their application in the fields of psychology and cultural studies. In particular, in modern society, the potential of flower and bird paintings as a tool for emotional regulation has received increasing attention. Nevertheless, the limitations of this study lie in the limited case sample and the lack of in-depth discussion of cross-cultural communication. Future research can

further deepen the multidimensional understanding of Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings by expanding the sample range, increasing cross-cultural analysis, and combining digital technology, and explore its practical application in contemporary cultural communication and psychological healing.

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