



# The Influence of Western Art Style on Oil Painting Education in Chinese Contemporary Art Colleges and Universities

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## Abstract

When Western art styles are incorporated into the field of oil painting education in Chinese contemporary art colleges, it greatly promotes the diversified development of oil painting education in China. The traditional training and realism style that form the framework of Chinese oil painting education are gradually being challenged, allowing for a more diverse and free approach to oil painting education in Chinese contemporary art colleges. This paper focuses on the Western art style as a starting point for research. It primarily compares the development history and characteristics of Western art styles, and explores the direct and indirect influence of Western art styles on oil painting education in Chinese contemporary art colleges and universities. The aim is to provide research ideas for the sustainable development of oil painting education in Chinese contemporary art colleges and universities.

## Keywords

Western art style, Chinese oil painting, oil painting education, creative thinking

## 1. Introduction

Oil painting, as an imported art form, has been developed in China for more than a hundred years since it was introduced to China during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. In the process of continuous development, it has gradually become one of the main forms of expression of Chinese painting creation, and different eras have given different meanings to the art of oil painting.

In China, oil painting education has a long history of development, which is deeply rooted in Chinese traditional culture and also grows under the influence of Western art. The early Western art style has had a profound influence on oil painting education in Chinese contemporary art colleges and universities from the inside to the outside (E Odokuma, 2010), and oil painting education in Chinese contemporary art colleges and universities has fully borrowed from western art style and education mode, no matter in teaching method, creation or creation, and in the teaching method, creation or creation, oil painting education has fully borrowed from western art style and education mode, no matter in the teaching method, creation or creation. Contemporary oil painting education in Chinese art colleges has also drawn on Western artistic styles and educational modes in its aesthetic, teaching, and creative processes, and has contributed to the influence and development of oil painting education in China, whether in teaching methods, creative styles or teaching concepts and practices. From the beginning of the 20th century to the present, the development of oil painting education in China can be regarded as a mirror image of China's contact and exchange with Western art.

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## 2. Overview of Western Art Styles

### 2.1 Development of Western Art Style

The historical development of Western art styles can be traced back to the Middle Ages. As early as the Renaissance in the 14th-16th centuries, Oil painters emphasised the concern for humanism and the fine depiction of nature as the key content in their creations, and Italian artists such as Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Raphael were the most renowned at that time; in the 17th century, the Baroque art style gradually took shape, and it was famous for its style which emphasised on the emphasis on movement, light, shadow, and emotion; at the beginning of the 18th century, the Rococo style was popular for its ease, elegance and romance; at the beginning of the 18th century, the Rococo style was popular among artists; in the 18th and 19th centuries, more and more artists began to emphasise personal emotion and reverence for nature, and the Romantic style was thus formed.

After the 19th century, oil painting artists began to pursue a realistic portrayal of real life, at which time the art style officially entered the period of realism; at the beginning of the 20th century, oil painters pursued to capture the instantaneous changes in light and colour, such as colour contrast and shape simplification, the Impressionist style was thus formed; at the end of the 20th century, the emergence of Cubism and Abstract Art completely broke the traditional artistic expression, the formation of a unique artistic style and pluralistic values. By the end of the 20th century, the emergence of Cubism and Abstract Art completely broke the traditional artistic expression methods, and the formation of its unique artistic style and diversified values has made certain reference to the development of oil painting education in China's contemporary art colleges and universities, which have begun to focus on the incorporation of Western artistic styles into oil painting education, so that the students can master the skills of oil painting and at the same time be able to absorb the advantages of the Western artistic style in their creations, for example, many art colleges and universities have emphasised on the mastery of the classical sketching and oil painting techniques in their teaching, focusing on enhancing the creativity and independence of students. Focus on improving students' creativity and independent thinking ability, through the integration of Chinese and Western elements to break the boundaries between the traditional educational art styles of oil painting (Gao Z, 2023).

### 2.2 Main characteristics of Western art style

Western art style covers the evolution and history and culture of oil painting from the Middle Ages to the modern creative style, and its depth and breadth originated from the continuous exploration of the form, technique, theme, and expression of oil painting by artists in different periods. Therefore, the main features of the Western art style are sorted out, mainly in its technical, visual, personalised, diverse, cultural, and innovative features.

## 3. The Direct Influence of Western Art Styles on Oil Painting Education in Chinese Contemporary Art Colleges and Universities

### 3.1 Teaching content level

Along with the increasing scale of oil painting education in Chinese contemporary art colleges and universities, the study of Western art styles and style borrowing has become an important teaching content of oil painting education in art colleges and universities. Many Western art schools and classic oil paintings have become important learning and research contents in Chinese oil painting education.

For example, Leonardo da Vinci's oil painting "Mona Lisa's Smile" in the Renaissance period, Rubens' religious oil painting "Resurrection" in the Baroque art, François Boucher's oil painting "Venus and Cupid" in the Rococo period, and the Impressionist master Van Gogh's oil painting "Sunflowers", etc., are the essential classic teaching cases in the teaching of oil painting courses of the contemporary art colleges in China.

The theoretical study of Western art styles and the concept of oil painting practice have contributed to the enrichment and diversification of the case contents of oil painting teaching in China, and the Western art styles of different periods have also been included in the teaching materials of oil painting courses in Chinese colleges and universities. As a result, Western art styles have provided oil painting students with rich art civilisation, oil painting knowledge, classic case works and aesthetic vision.

### 3.2 Teaching Method Level

Early oil painting education in China's contemporary art colleges and universities used the Western art style as a reference standard in both painting expression and colour composition. Many art colleges have also absorbed the personalised,

innovative, and diversified features of Western art styles in the teaching methods of oil painting education.

In the process of implementing oil painting teaching methods, most of the art colleges and universities have integrated the fine skills and unique visual expression methods of Western art styles into the daily teaching of oil painting, such as perspective, colour theory, spatial processing, composition creation method, etc. They also focus on the students as the centre of their teaching objectives, open up the cultivation of critical thinking, and focus on the cultivation of innovative abilities in their teaching concepts to provide all-round cultivation for students majoring in oil painting (Yi Guodong, 2021). The teaching concept focuses on the cultivation of the creative ability to cultivate oil painting students in an all-round way.

Taking the modern oil painting creation major opened by the Central Academy of Fine Arts as an example, it has taken the lead in introducing the advanced experience of art management disciplines and professional construction in Europe and the United States in terms of teaching methodology, and in the training of oil painting creation, students are required to have an in-depth understanding of the artistic styles of the West in different periods, and to learn and comprehend the characteristics of the Western artistic styles, and the education of this major has experienced the process of evolving from borrowing from the Western styles to the process of cultural self-consciousness and self-confidence, which has also promoted the international development of the oil painting education major. It also promotes the international development of oil painting education. From this, we can see that the Western art style also plays an important role in promoting the teaching method of oil painting in art colleges.

### 3.3 Teaching Theory

In the teaching theory of oil painting in Chinese contemporary art colleges and universities, western art style theories and philosophical thoughts of different periods are integrated into oil painting teaching, such as formalism, structuralism, existentialism, minimalism, decorative, etc., which effectively enriches the level of theoretical research in Chinese oil painting education.

Many oil painting students have been influenced by Western art style theories for a long time in the process of learning and understanding Western art styles, and most of the art colleges and universities usually emphasise in their teaching theories that they draw on and absorb the elements and expressive techniques of western art styles in their creations, so as to make their oil paintings appear richer and more diversified in their picture visions, for example, the Chinese painter Wu Guanzhong has proposed that in the creation of oil paintings, he can take the following measures For example, the Chinese painter Wu Guanzhong once proposed that in the creation of oil paintings, he could adopt the teaching theories of "combination of Chinese and Western" and "beauty of form", and organically integrate the realism and abstract expressionism of Western art styles with Chinese traditional culture, so as to "localise" the expression of oil painting style in China. Theory of "Formal Beauty" and "Creative Teaching

Take Wu Guanzhong's oil painting "Lotus" as an example, as shown in Figure 1, the painter pays attention to the traditional realism of the lotus image, but also stresses the abstract expressiveness of the oil painting colours, lines, and compositions, and fuses realism and abstractionism, so as to make the works have a strong visual impact, "combining the East and the West", The teaching theory of "Formal Beauty" is also advocated by many art schools. It can be seen that the oil painting education in Chinese contemporary art colleges has gradually formed its own art theories in the process of borrowing Western art styles for a long time, and these art theories have provided an inexhaustible creative impetus for the development of Chinese oil painting nationalisation.



(a) Oil painting effect



(b) Oil painting partial effect

**Fig. 1. Wu Guanzhong's oil painting "Lotus".**

## 4. The Indirect Influence of Western Art Style on Oil Painting Education in Chinese Contemporary Art Colleges and Universities

### 4.1 Change of Aesthetic Concept

Due to the relatively weak foundation of China's oil painting development, many Chinese art colleges pay great attention to the one-way transmission of education in the process of oil painting education, overly stressing the training of oil painting techniques, which to a certain extent inhibits the students' subjective consciousness and learning initiative in oil painting creation.

The introduction of Western art styles in the oil painting education of Chinese contemporary art colleges and universities has prompted many students to have the opportunity to contact and understand the art concepts and aesthetic concepts of different periods, which has broadened their artistic horizons and enriched their aesthetic experience in oil painting creation.

Take abstractionism and Dadaism in Western art styles as an example, which tends to emphasise the individuality and unique perspective of the artist, such concepts have influenced the general aesthetic concepts of oil painting education in Chinese art academies. In the past, oil painting education in China may be more inclined to traditional and collective aesthetic standards, while now more and more educators and students are beginning to respect and encourage the artistic expression of individualised creation in oil painting (Yiping Z, 2020).

### 4.2 Cultivation of Creative Awareness

The diversity and openness of Western art styles have challenged China's traditional art concepts and educational norms, opening up new paths of cognition and creativity for Chinese oil painting education, which has led to oil painting education in Chinese art academies beginning to place more emphasis on innovation and experimentation.

For example, abstract art encourages oil painting to explore elements such as colour, line, and shape in-depth, emphasizing the subjectivity and emotional expression of artistic creation. This way of thinking undoubtedly broadens the possibilities of innovation in oil painting, guiding students to step out of the traditional framework and try out new visual languages and ways of expression.

Taking the oil painting creative course of Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts in China as an example, it has carried out the creative theme of "Tribute to the Masters", and many students chose to copy the classic works of different periods in the Western art styles, as shown in Fig. 2, the students majoring in oil painting adapted their creative thinking according to the classic oil painting Mona Lisa, and integrated modernism, Dadaism style, and cartoon elements into the oil painting creation, which demonstrated the creators' rich sense of creative thinking and enhanced the fun and visual sense. Modernism, Dadaism style, and cartoon elements in the oil painting creation prompted the oil painting works of fun, and visual enhancement, showing the creators of a rich sense of innovative thinking, from the side can also be seen that the creators were indirectly affected by the personalised, visual, innovative characteristics of the Western art style.



(a) Effect of oil painting



(b) Partial effect of oil painting

**Fig. 2. Creative work of oil painting "Mona Lisa with glasses".**

## 5. Implications of Western Art Styles for Oil Painting Education in Chinese Contemporary Art Colleges and Universities

Over the past century, Western art styles have stimulated the curiosity and exploratory spirit of teachers and students towards the unknown and pushed teaching activities towards a more free and open direction. From the early Renaissance and Impressionism to Modernism and Post-Modernism, many genres and styles of Western art have directly or indirectly influenced Chinese oil painting education and creators, prompting them to rethink their creative concepts and teaching methods.

For a long time, oil painting education in Chinese contemporary art colleges and universities has been absorbing and integrating foreign art styles and concepts, and at the same time searching for new ways to understand and express their own cultures and new techniques. From a certain point of view, this kind of exchange and influence are not unidirectional, and Chinese artists and scholars have also exerted a certain influence on the Western art world. For example, the famous oil painting educators Wu Guanzhong, Zao Wou-ki, Lin Fengmian, etc., have created oil paintings that show the characteristics of oriental aesthetics, but also fully integrate the Western art style. Without exception, they have also been deeply influenced by the masters of western modernist art, such as Picasso, Matisse, and Klee, in their oil painting creations and education, and they have integrated their own unique styles in their creations.

In contemporary times, China's oil painting education is also placing more and more emphasis on the cultivation of personalised expression and innovative thinking, and more and more art colleges are committed to providing an educational environment that respects tradition, absorbs borrowings, and encourages open-mindedness, aiming at inducing students to fully absorb the advantages of Western art styles, and then guiding them to the unique artistic sensitivity and innovative thinking in oil painting education and creation, so that they can master the techniques of oil painting, and also gain a better understanding of the historical, stylistic and philosophical background of oil painting, thereby adapting to the ever-changing landscape of global art education. The aim is to induce students to fully absorb the advantages of Western artistic styles, and then guide them to unique artistic sensitivity and innovative thinking in oil painting education and creation so that they can master oil painting techniques and at the same time gain a better understanding of oil painting's historical, stylistic, theoretical and philosophical backgrounds, in order to adapt to the ever-changing global art education pattern.

In this context, Chinese oil painting education should actively introduce the experimental spirit advocated by Western art styles and its spirit of exploration in terms of materials, techniques, and contents (Zixuan G, 2022), so as to promote the development of oil painting education in a freer and more open direction.

## 6. Conclusion

Western art styles have directly influenced the reform of oil painting education in China, while also indirectly shifting the focus of Chinese oil painting education towards the development of students' individuality and the cultivation of their creative abilities. In the future of oil painting education, Chinese contemporary art colleges should encourage students to engage in deep thinking during their oil painting creations and to express their observations of society and life in a personalized manner. This approach ensures that oil painting education goes beyond the formal level and motivates students to continuously explore new art forms and expressions in their oil painting creations.

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