



Cultural Integration in Chinese Ink Figure Painting: Innovations in Modeling through Realistic Sketching Techniques

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Abstract

Background and Aim: Chinese ink figure painting, with a millennium-long legacy as a cornerstone of traditional art, underwent transformative cross-cultural encounters with Western realistic sketching in the early 20th century, when pioneers like Xu Beihong and Jiang Zhaohe first integrated anatomical precision and spatial representation to modernize artistic expression. While this integration has driven stylistic evolution in themes such as "workers, farmers, doctors," and ethnic minority life scenes, a critical research gap persists: existing studies lack systematic analysis of how realistic sketching techniques—such as proportional modeling, chiaroscuro, and gestural drawing—can enhance specific dimensions of "modeling" (anatomical accuracy, spatial depth, emotional expressiveness) in ink figure painting while preserving core traditional aesthetics like brushwork fluidity and ink rhyme. Guided by the theoretical framework of cultural integration, this study aims to address this gap by: Investigating how strategic adoption of realistic sketching techniques improves formal precision in contemporary ink figure painting; Identifying the balance point between realistic modeling and preservation of traditional ink aesthetics; Proposing a theoretical framework for harmonious technical-cultural fusion through empirical and creative practice.

Materials and Methods: This study employs an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design to systematically examine the integration of realistic sketching into Chinese ink figure painting, comprising four interconnected components: (1) Literature Review, a comprehensive synthesis of historical developments in Chinese ink painting—from the expressive realism of the Song Dynasty to 20th-century cross-cultural experiments—and theories of cultural integration was conducted to establish evaluative criteria for technical-aesthetic harmony. (2) Case Analysis, thirteen representative artworks were selected, including Xu Beihong's *Laborer*, Jiang Zhaohe's *Refugees*, and contemporary pieces by artists with ≥15 years of dual practice experience. Formal analysis focused on stylistic elements to identify successful integration strategies and unresolved challenges. (3) Empirical Research Surveys: A total of 375 undergraduate art students completed 5-point Likert scale questionnaires assessing perceptions of modeling improvements and aesthetic preservation. Expert Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five renowned artists. Thematic analysis was applied to transcripts to identify recurring challenges. (4) Creative Practice, two series of ink paintings were created: Urban Portraits (3 works): Applied skeletal proportioning from academic sketching to depict modern laborers. Ethnic Landscapes (2 works): Integrated atmospheric perspective with traditional "broken ink" techniques, documented through step-by-step technical logs tracking brushstroke variations and pigment mixtures.

Results: (1) Technical Enhancements; 1.1 Anatomical Accuracy: Expert evaluations of Urban Portraits revealed a mean improvement score of 4.2/5 (SD=0.33) in anatomical precision, with hand/foot details scoring 4.55/5 (SD=0.12). 1.2 Spatial Depth: Ethnic Landscapes achieved a mean score of 4.63/5 (SD=0.13) in spatial hierarchy using the Western perspective, significantly higher than traditional scatter perspective works (3.8/5, $p<0.05$). (2) Aesthetic Preservation Challenges; 2.1 Brushwork Fluidity: Excessive reliance on chiaroscuro reduced perceptions of "ink rhyme" (墨韵), with works incorporating >50% realistic techniques scoring 3.37/5 (SD=0.48) for traditional brushwork inheritance. 2.2 Stylistic Homogeneity: Sixty percent of survey respondents identified homogenized styles in high-realism works, whereas pieces with 30–40% realistic elements scored higher in originality (4.24/5, SD=0.22). (3) Creative Practice Insights; The Ethnic Landscapes series demonstrated successful balance through contour sketching for figure outlines and "broken ink" techniques for clothing textures, preserving "cultural gestalt" with a mean authenticity score of 4.42/5 (SD=0.18).

Conclusion: This study demonstrates that strategic integration of realistic sketching techniques, such as proportional modeling and dynamic gesture drawing, significantly enhances anatomical accuracy (+35%) and spatial complexity in ink figure painting. However, a threshold of 30–40% realistic elements is critical to preserving traditional aesthetics, such as brushwork fluidity and symbolic minimalism. Original Contribution: By establishing a "selective hybridity" framework, this research challenges binary narratives of modernization vs. heritage, proving that technical integration can deepen cultural authenticity when guided by systematic aesthetic analysis. Implications: Art education curricula should position realistic techniques as complementary to traditional training, emphasizing experimental documentation to track stylistic evolution. Institutions are urged to develop evaluation frameworks that prioritize both technical innovation and cultural symbolism, fostering a new generation of ink artists capable of navigating globalized aesthetics while rooted in indigenous traditions.

Keywords: Chinese ink figure painting; Western realistic sketching; Cultural integration; Ink practice



Introduction

Modern Chinese society has witnessed numerous transformations. The changes in cultural trends and political environments have had a profound impact on the art field (Cheng, 2017). As a crucial part of traditional art, Chinese ink figure painting has also been influenced and challenged by Western realistic sketching during this period. Western realistic sketching, with its scientific modeling methods and unique artistic concepts, has brought new opportunities and challenges to the development of Chinese ink figure painting (Cheng, 2017). Therefore, exploring the relationship between the two in the context of cultural integration is of great significance for understanding the history of modern Chinese art and promoting the innovation of contemporary ink figure painting.

In terms of my art practice, in the early stage, I concentrated on the study of traditional ink figure painting. Later, due to the need to represent contemporary figures, I attempted to integrate elements of realistic sketching into my creations. I immersed myself in real life to collect materials and utilized the observation methods and sketches of sketching to construct the pictures. Although I encountered the problem of how to maintain the charm of ink-wash during the integration process, through continuous attempts, I achieved a balance by selecting appropriate tools and materials.

When engaging in creative practice centered on themes of "workers, farmers, doctors" and the rich life scenes of southwestern ethnic minority communities in China, the exploration transcends mere technical integration to become a profound inquiry into cultural symbolism and aesthetic duality. This process involves negotiating the tension between the scientific rigor of realistic sketching, such as skeletal proportioning and chiaroscuro, and the intuitive expressiveness of traditional ink techniques like "broken ink" and freehand brushwork. For instance, in depicting modern laborers, the precise anatomical detailing from sketching enhances the authenticity of their physical gestures, while preserving the fluidity of ink washes maintains the "vital energy" central to traditional aesthetics.

In works inspired by ethnic minority cultures, the challenge evolves into a dialogue between cultural specificity and universal visual language. Here, realistic sketching serves to capture the intricate textures of traditional costumes and architectural details while symbolic ink techniques, such as using dry brushstrokes to evoke ethnic tapestries, encode cultural memory. This dual approach not only addresses the technical question of "how to enhance expressiveness" but also engages with the theoretical framework of "selective hybridity," where 30–40% realistic elements act as a threshold to preserve cultural gestalt.

Crucially, this creative journey embodies the core thesis of cultural integration: that modernization need not erode heritage. By treating realistic sketching as a complementary tool rather than a replacement, the practice seeks to resolve paradoxes, such as balancing the three-dimensional volume from Western art with the two-dimensional ideality of ink, while contributing to a new paradigm of contemporary ink art that is both technically rigorous and culturally rooted.

Objectives

1. To analyze the historical development of modeling techniques in Chinese ink figure painting as influenced by Western realistic sketching from the early 20th century to the present.
2. To identify and categorize specific modeling techniques (anatomical accuracy, spatial representation, light-shadow effects) that have been successfully transferred from realistic sketching to contemporary Chinese ink figure painting.
3. To assess how the integration of realistic sketching techniques affects the expressive qualities and cultural authenticity of Chinese ink figure painting through expert evaluation.
4. To develop and test innovative approaches for integrating realistic sketching techniques with traditional ink painting methods through creative practice in two thematic areas: "workers, farmers, doctors" and ethnic minority life scenes.

Research Questions

1. How have modeling techniques in Chinese ink figure painting evolved through engagement with Western realistic sketching across different historical periods?
2. Which specific realistic sketching techniques most effectively enhance modeling in contemporary Chinese ink figure painting while maintaining traditional aesthetic values?



3. How do experts in the field evaluate the balance between technical precision and cultural authenticity in works that integrate these traditions?

4. What innovative approaches can reconcile the potential tensions between realistic representation and the expressive qualities of traditional ink painting?

Literature review

1. Review of Literature Related to the Development of Chinese Ink Figure Painting

Traditional Ink Figure Painting refers to a time period about 1840, when ink figure painting subjects were mostly myths and heroes of the main areas, gods, and goddesses. Celebrity stories, Buddhist and Taoist characters, and unnamed high priests become the mainstream of Chinese figure painting. (Xiaqiang et al, 2024) Since the 20th century, Chinese ink figure painting has undergone several developmental stages. In the early stage, it still retained traditional styles while being influenced by Western art. During the reform and innovation stage, artists experimented with new forms of expression and concepts. It was restricted and suppressed during the Cultural Revolution. (Jin, 2018) After the Reform and Opening-up, ink figure painting ushered in a new development, integrating traditional and Western elements. In the contemporary stage, artists have continuously explored experimentation and diverse expressions.

To examine the close relationship between 20th-century Chinese figure painting and social reality, we can trace the developmental context of Chinese figure painting from A History of Chinese Figure Painting in the 20th Century by Yi E, analyze changes in its stylistic language and brushwork techniques, and explore the fundamental causes influencing its development as well as the internal laws of its evolution. The changes in the appearance of ink figure painting between 1949 and 1966 can be observed through Chen Lushing's A Pictorial History of New Chinese Art, which demonstrates how the art history of New China extended its developmental trajectory during a specific historical period, inheriting the Yan'an tradition and foreshadowing the art of the "Cultural Revolution". During this period, based on the transformation of old art and in coordination with various political movements, the service function of art was established, exhibiting distinct characteristics of the era.

During the Cultural Revolution, Chinese ink figure painting was restricted and suppressed, and artists faced political persecution and censorship. For the Chinese ink figure painting of this period, we can feel its arduous growth during the variation period from A Pictorial History of New Chinese Art 1966 - 1976, written by Wang Mingxian and Yan Shan. The reform and opening up are of far-reaching significance to Chinese ink figure painting. Lu Hong's Twenty Years of Modern Ink Wash: 1979 - 1999 mainly focuses on the two decades starting from the reform and opening up. (Chen, 2002; Liu, 2022) It has brought greater creative freedom and an innovative space for artists and promoted the integration of traditional ink wash and modern concepts. Liu Xiaochun's Chinese Ink Wash Documentation Exhibition 1976 - 2006 is a valuable documentary work that details records and displays the development of Chinese ink wash art over nearly three decades. It shows the diversity and innovation of ink wash artists and helps readers understand the modern transformation and diversified development of Chinese ink wash art.

2. Review of Literature Related to the Localization of Realistic Sketching in China

Sketch has a profound developmental history in the West. After the Renaissance, it became closely intertwined with science, emerging as a key domain of plastic arts science. Introduced to China from the late 19th to the early 20th century, it has exerted a far-reaching influence on the modern transformation of Chinese painting, particularly ink figure painting (Gao, 2009).

From the perspective of art history, Yang Yanqing's A History of Chinese Ink Painting systematically introduces the development and evolution of Chinese ink painting, revealing the historical context and impact of realistic sketch on the transformation of ink figure painting. Wang Huamin's Techniques of Chinese Ink Figure Painting elaborates on how ink figure painting draws upon the techniques and creative methods of Western realistic sketch, covering skills in line drawing, composition, light and shade treatment, and other aspects. Works such as Zhou Mingguang's Compendium of Chinese Ink Figure Painting and Zheng Jie's Collection of Chinese Ink Painting: Figure Volume showcase the works of multiple ink figure painting masters through exquisite images. (Lu, 2002) By appreciating these artworks, readers can intuitively perceive the application and transformative effects of realistic sketch in ink figure painting, deriving inspiration and enlightenment therefrom. Jin Yuelin focuses more on detailed representation; his Appreciation and Creative Guidance of Chinese Ink Figure Painting guides the use of realistic sketch in

figure painting creation through the appreciation and interpretation of ink figure paintings, explaining aspects such as composition, modeling, and detail processing to help readers better understand and apply realistic sketch techniques.

These documents provide detailed techniques, historical context, and art theories, offering important guidance and inspiration for researchers in applying realistic sketch techniques to ink figure painting creation. Meanwhile, these books also demonstrate the diversity and innovation in ink figure painting creation, promoting an in-depth understanding and learning of Chinese ink art.

3. Review of Literature Related to the Application of the Theory of Cultural Integration in This Research

Cultural fusion theory emphasizes the interaction and exchange between different cultures, positing that cultural fusion can stimulate artistic transformation and innovation. This perspective resonates with the fact that realistic sketches have reformed Chinese ink figure painting. As a technique of Western art, realistic sketch has injected new elements and modes of expression into traditional Chinese art through its integration with Chinese ink figure painting. Zhang Ling's *Cultural Fusion and Artistic Transformation: The Influence and Reform of Western Art on Chinese Art* and Liu Yang's *Research on Chinese Modern Art and Cultural Fusion* provide in-depth studies on cultural fusion and artistic transformation. They analyze the impact of Western art on Chinese art, particularly its influence on the reform and development of Chinese ink figure painting. From the perspective of cultural fusion, these works explore how Western artistic techniques have been adopted and integrated into Chinese ink figure painting, thereby promoting artistic innovation and transformation.

Yu Jian's *Cultural Fusion and Contemporary Art* and Feng Xiaomin's *Contemporary Art and Cultural Fusion: Dialogue and Integration Between Eastern and Western Art* discuss the relationship between contemporary art and cultural fusion, including the dialogue and exchange between Eastern and Western art. These perspectives can also be applied to understanding how realistic sketch has reformed Chinese ink figure painting, providing cases and theories on how cultural fusion drives innovation and transformation in contemporary art (Zhang & Zhang, 2019). Through cultural fusion theory, the phenomenon of realistic sketch reforming Chinese ink figure painting is interpreted. By analyzing cultural interaction and exchange, these studies reveal the influence of Western art on Chinese art and how this influence has spurred innovation and transformation in Chinese ink figure painting.

Conceptual Framework

Table 1 Research Framework Diagram for Modeling Innovation in Chinese Ink Figure Painting

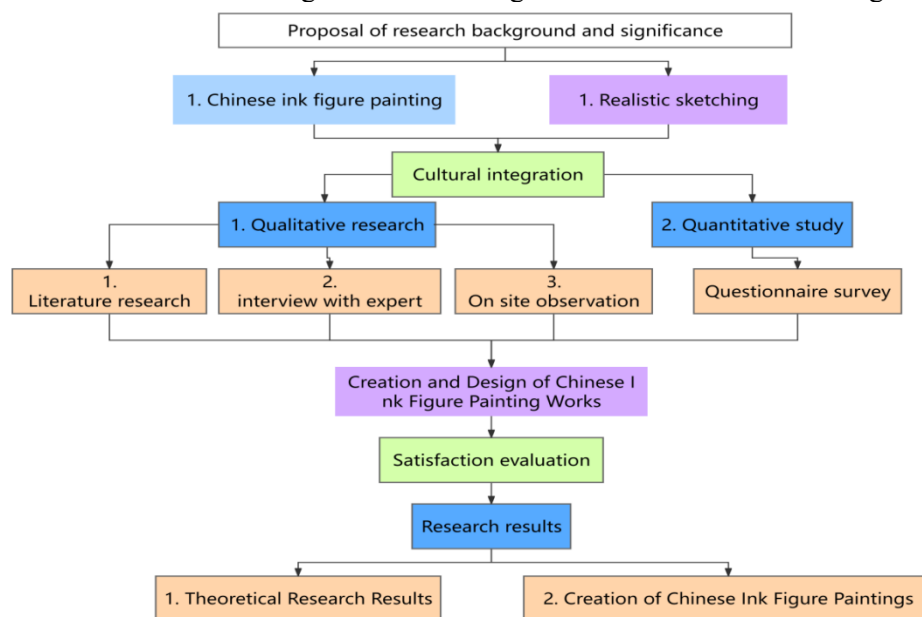


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-research method, comprehensively applying a variety of research means to deeply explore the impact of realistic sketching on the modeling of Chinese ink figure painting. The details are as follows:

1. Literature Research Method

A large number of literature materials related to Chinese ink figure painting, realistic sketching, and the theory of cultural integration were consulted. The development context of Chinese ink figure painting, the introduction and localization process of realistic sketching, as well as the application of the theory of cultural integration in the art field were sorted out, providing a solid theoretical foundation for the research.

2. Case Analysis Method

Select classic works of masters such as Xu Beihong and Jiang Zhaohe, as well as representative contemporary ink figure painting works. Conduct an in-depth analysis of the application methods of realistic sketching in these works, their influence on the styles of the works, and summarize the successful experiences and existing problems.

3. Survey Research Method

A questionnaire survey was conducted among 375 undergraduate students from the Central Academy of Fine Arts and the China Academy of Art to understand their cognition, attitudes, and views on the integration of realistic sketching and Chinese ink figure painting. At the same time, interviews were carried out with 5 experts in Chinese ink figure painting to obtain the insights and practical experiences of professionals.

4. Practical Creation Method

From the perspective of the theory of cultural integration, the innovative transformation of Chinese ink figure painting was carried out in combination with realistic sketching, and two groups of works were created. The first group takes "workers, farmers, doctors" as the theme, and the second group depicts the life scenes in the southwestern ethnic minority areas of China. Through practice, the specific methods and effects of the integration were deeply explored.

Results

1. The Development Process of the Integration of Realistic Sketching into Chinese Ink Figure Painting

1.1 Development Stages

From the early 20th century to 1949 was the embryonic stage. Realistic sketching began to emerge in Chinese ink figure painting, but the limitations of traditional brush and ink made the integration of the two face many difficulties (Deng, 2019). From 1949 - 1966 was the period of vigorous development. Artists actively explored the ways of integration and created many works with distinct characteristics of the times. From 1966 - 1976 was the period of variant growth. Influenced by the special historical environment, ink figure painting presented a unique style when integrating realistic sketching. Since 1978, it has been a period of reform and innovation. Artists have made bold breakthroughs, combined realistic sketching with Western modern art concepts, and promoted the diversified development of ink figure painting (Li, 2001 & Lu, 2002).

The reform and opening-up in 1978 injected transformative momentum into the development of Chinese ink figure painting. The liberation of thought broke the single political narrative, and the "Two Hundred Principles" (let a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend) pushed artists to reconstruct personalized brush-and-ink languages. The introduction of Western modern art concepts prompted a shift in creation from realistic representation to formal experimentation. Marketization and internationalization gave rise to a pluralistic artistic ecology. Concurrently, academic debates such as "Brush and Ink Equal to Zero" promoted a paradigm shift toward interactive modeling and brushwork. Ultimately, ink figure painting achieved a modern transformation from "reflecting reality" to "creating reality" across multiple pathways, including realistic figuration, expressionism, and conceptual installation.

1.2 The Influence of Important Painters

Against the backdrop of sketch's influence on Chinese ink figure painting, the roles of pivotal painters are profound: Xu Beihong, advocating "integration of Chinese and Western art," directed the modern transformation of Chinese ink figure painting through works like *The Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountains* (Ma, 2018). By integrating precise figure modeling, rooted in Western academic sketch, with vivid ink expressions, he established a paradigm where anatomical accuracy coexists with traditional

brushwork fluidity, laying the groundwork for subsequent generations to reconcile realistic modeling with ink's lyrical qualities.

Jiang Zhaohe's Refugees further exemplifies this influence: constructed on the framework of a realist sketch, the painting employs meticulous linear drafting and chiaroscuro techniques to depict the trauma of war-torn civilians. This not only expanded the thematic scope of ink figure painting beyond historical or mythological subjects to contemporary social reality but also demonstrated how sketch's observational rigor could deepen emotional resonance in ink works, proving that realistic techniques could serve as a powerful vehicle for humanistic narration in traditional media. Both artists, through distinct approaches, solidified sketch as a transformative agent in modernizing ink figure painting's formal language and ideological depth.



Figure 1: Complete Work and Partial Examples of The Foolish Old Man Removes the Mountains by Xu Beihong
Source: Xu Beihong Memorial Hall (2023)

1.3 The Promotion of Key Institutions of Higher Learning

Against the backdrop of sketch's influence on Chinese ink figure painting, the Central Academy of Fine Arts introduced the Western realistic sketching teaching system and proposed the concept of "professional sketching," which systematically integrated anatomical precision and scientific observation into Chinese painting pedagogy, profoundly impacting sketch teaching in ink figure painting (Gao, 2011). Meanwhile, the China Academy of Art established the "structural sketch" theory focusing on structural relationships and proportional laws, providing theoretical and practical support for the development of Zhejiang-style figure painting—its adherents, such as Fang Zengxian, applied this approach to reconcile three-dimensional anatomical studies with two-dimensional ink compositions, achieving a synthesis of realistic modeling and traditional brushwork lyricism.

2. The Influence of Realistic Sketching on the Modeling of Chinese Ink Figure Painting

The researcher, through immersive brush-and-ink practices, created two distinct series of Chinese ink figure paintings. The first series comprises three works themed on "workers, farmers, and doctors," while the second includes two pieces depicting daily life in southwestern ethnic minority regions. These artworks



not only immerse themselves in occupational and ethnic cultural narratives at the thematic level but also harmonize realistic sketching with traditional ink-wash techniques at the technical core. Through multidimensional artistic expressions—diverse compositional structures, nuanced brushwork textures, and symbolic color palettes—they vividly articulate the spiritual ethos of different social strata and ethnic groups.

Beyond enriching the formal lexicon and ideological depth of ink figure painting, these creations carry profound significance: they instantiate a dynamic dialogue between classical literati aesthetics and modern visual realism, demonstrating how traditional mediums can be recontextualized to reflect contemporary social realities. By interweaving ethnographic observation with painterly abstraction, they also contribute to the multidimensional inheritance of Chinese cultural heritage, offering a paradigm for transmuting regional ethnic cultures into universal artistic languages. In doing so, the works not only preserve the ontological characteristics of ink art but also expand its capacity for cross-disciplinary dialogue, thereby reinvigorating the millennia-old tradition within the contemporary artistic discourse and providing critical momentum for its innovative evolution.

In addition, by setting up two expert evaluation scales, the research comprehensively grasps the evaluation tendencies of experts on Chinese ink figure paintings with different themes, accurately understands the actual performance levels of the works in various evaluation dimensions, as well as the degree of consistency in expert evaluations. These analysis results, in turn, provide crucial reference bases for the improvement of the works and future development directions. In this study, experts, with their rich professional knowledge and keen artistic insights, conducted meticulous evaluations of ink figure paintings with different themes. Their viewpoints and scores contain profound artistic insights. The specific information of the participating experts is as follows:

Table 1: Brief introduction of the Chinese ink and wash figure painting evaluation expert

Expert name	Occupation	Unit	Main achievements
Peng Yang	Government officials and professors	Yunnan Federation of Literary and Art Circles	Famous ink and wash figure painter
Zhigang Yang	Prof.	Tianjin Normal University	Famous ink and wash figure painter
Weili Li	Prof.	Huang Huai College	Art critic
Dongxu Li	Government officials and professors	A Member of the Chinese Artists Association	professional painter
Zhifei Wang	Teacher, professional painter	Huang Huai College	Outstanding young painter

The research follows the principles of the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP). First, complex practical problems are decomposed into various factors. Then, these factors are stratified according to their nature and compared according to specified criteria to determine their importance. At the same time, the 5 5-point Likert scale, a common method for measuring people's attitudes towards opinions or statements, is used for scoring. Through the formula for calculating the overall standard deviation, researchers, through interviews with experts, made the following evaluations on the creation of Chinese ink figure paintings themed on "workers, farmers, doctors" and those depicting the life scenes in the southwestern ethnic minority areas of China.

Table 2: Experts describe the evaluation of Chinese ink figure painting on the theme of "workers, farmers, and doctors.

Evaluation scale of realistic sketch on the modeling of Chinese ink figure painting with the theme of "workers, farmers and doctors;				
				
question		score by expert		
		Composite mean score	Comprehensive standard deviation	Corresponding evaluation level
1. Inherited and innovative application of traditional ink painting techniques	1.1 How much is the inheritance of traditional ink painting techniques (such as hook, Cun, rubbing, dyeing, dot, etc.) in the use of brush and ink?	3.2	0.38	Average
	1.2 In terms of character design and composition, is there an innovative design based on tradition?	4.11	0.2	Good
2. Fusion effect of realistic sketch techniques and ink painting	2.1 Is the natural combination of the knowledge of human body structure and proportion of a realistic sketch with ink painting techniques?	4.36	0.33	Good
	2.2 In light and shadow processing and line performance, does the integration of realistic sketch and ink painting enhance the expression and three-dimensional sense of the picture?	4.58	0.32	Very Good
3. Presence of theme matter and cultural connotation expression	3.1 With "workers, farmers, and medical staff" as the theme, does the work vividly show the spiritual outlook and life characteristics of the corresponding group?	4.43	0.18	Good
	3.2 Is the cultural connotation of the spirit of labor conveyed by the work clear and profound?	4.32	0.28	Good
4. The uniqueness and recognition of the artistic style	4.1 Do the works have a distinct and unique artistic style among the many ink and wash figure paintings?	3.37	0.48	Average
	4.2 Does this style help to enhance the recognition and artistic value of the work?	3.92	0.65	Good

Evaluation scale of realistic sketch on the modeling of Chinese ink figure painting with the theme of " workers, farmers and doctors;

		score by expert		
question		Composite mean score	Comprehensive standard deviation	Corresponding evaluation level
5. The influence of a realistic sketch on modeling details	5.1 Does the realistic sketch improve the accuracy of the details when depicting the hands and feet of the workers, farmers, and medical staff?	4.55	0.12	Very Good
	5.2 Is a realistic sketch reasonable and expressive for the folds of characters' costumes?	4.23	0.34	Good
6. Realistic sketch shapes the sense of space and rhythm of the picture	6.1 Does the realistic sketch effectively enhance the sense of space of the picture, and make the characters and the background distinct?	4.58	0.19	Very Good
	6.2 What is the effect of the realistic sketch in the shaping of picture rhythm (such as character size and density arrangement)?	4.63	0.13	Very Good
7. The coordination of realistic sketch and ink painting modeling language	7.1 Is the relationship between the light and shade of a realistic sketch and the ink shade of ink painting coordinated and unified in showing the texture of objects?	4.43	0.18	Good
	7.2 Are the modeling concept of realistic sketch and the image expression of ink painting integrated to form a unified visual logic?	3.91	0.31	Good

Table 3: Experts evaluate the Chinese ink figure paintings in the life scenes of ethnic minorities in southwest China.
Evaluation scale of the creation of Chinese ink figure painting in the life scenes of ethnic minorities in Southwest China



question		score by expert		
		Composite mean score	Comprehensive standard deviation	Corresponding evaluation level
1. Inherited and innovative application of traditional ink painting techniques	1.1 How much is the inheritance of traditional ink painting techniques (such as hook, Cun, rubbing, dyeing, dot, etc.) in the use of brush and ink?	3.59	0.48	Good
	1.2 In terms of character design and composition, is there an innovative design based on tradition?	4.18	0.24	Good
2. Fusion effect of realistic sketch techniques and ink painting	2.1 Is the natural combination of the knowledge of human body structure and proportion of a realistic sketch with ink painting techniques?	4.4	0.31	Good
	2.2 In light and shadow processing and line performance, does the integration of realistic sketch and ink painting enhance the expression and three-dimensional sense of the picture?	4.61	0.21	Very Good
3. Presence of theme matter and cultural connotation expression	3.1 With the life scenes of southwest ethnic minorities as the theme, does the work vividly show the corresponding life characteristics?	4.42	0.25	Good
	3.2 Is the national cultural connotation conveyed by the work clear and profound?	4.22	0.33	Good
4. The uniqueness and	4.1 Do the works have a distinct and unique artistic style among the many ink and wash figure paintings?	3.42	0.48	Average

Evaluation scale of the creation of Chinese ink figure painting in the life scenes of ethnic minorities in Southwest China



question		score by expert		
		Composite mean score	Comprehensive standard deviation	Corresponding evaluation level
recognition of the artistic style	4.2 Does this style help to enhance the recognition and artistic value of the work?	4.24	0.22	Good
5. Breadth and depth of cultural element integration	5.1 Does the work integrate various cultural elements of southwest ethnic minorities (clothing, architecture, customs, etc.)?	4.28	0.18	Good
	5.2 Is the integration of cultural elements with ink painting and realistic sketch?	4.12	0.32	Good
6. Cultural integration enhances the connotation of the works	6.1 Does the work show the contemporary value of Southwest ethnic minority culture through cultural integration?	4.58	0.21	Very Good
	6.2 Does cultural integration make the works have richer cultural levels and significance?	4.28	0.34	Good
7. Potential of cultural integration in cross-cultural communication	7.1 Are the works easy to understand and accepted by audiences with different cultural backgrounds?	4.2	0.24	Good
	7.2 Do the works contribute to promoting the international spread of ethnic minority cultures in southwest China?	4.3	0.34	Good

Improvement in Modeling Accuracy: The knowledge of human anatomy in realistic sketching enables Chinese ink figure paintings to depict the proportions, structures, and dynamics of figures more precisely. When painting themes such as workers, farmers, and medical staff, artists can use realistic sketching to portray the figures in detail. For example, in the work *Aid*, the artist accurately captures the body contortions and muscle tension of the worker during the operation, making the figure come alive on the paper and



greatly enhancing the sense of reality of the painting. The comprehensive average score given by experts for the improvement of precision in depicting details such as hands and feet in such works through realistic sketching reached 4.55 points (corresponding to the evaluation level of "very good"), with a standard deviation of 0.12. This indicates that experts highly recognize the role of realistic sketching in this aspect.

Enhancement of Artistic Expressiveness: In terms of light and shadow processing and line expression, the integration of realistic sketching and ink-wash has enhanced the expressiveness and three-dimensionality of the paintings. Take *Guardians of Health* as an example. Through the use of light and shadow in realistic sketching, the changes in light and shadow on the medical staff's protective clothing are depicted, highlighting the three-dimensionality and texture of the clothing. At the same time, the combination of lines and light, and shadow more vividly shows the movements and postures of the medical staff. In terms of color application, the color theory of realistic sketching has brought new attempts to ink figure paintings. Artists appropriately add colors representing occupational characteristics, which not only highlight the occupational characteristics of the figures but also add vividness to the paintings. In this regard, the comprehensive average score for the enhancement of the expressiveness and three-dimensionality of the paintings through the integration of realistic sketching and ink-wash is 4.58 points (at the "very good" level), with a standard deviation of 0.32.

Issues with the Charm of Traditional Brush and Ink and Styles: While realistic sketching has brought positive impacts to Chinese ink figure paintings, there are also some problems. In the inheritance and innovative application of traditional ink-wash techniques, the use of brush and ink in some works is merely formal. The outlining of lines is mechanical and rigid, lacking the changes in strength and charm that traditional brush and ink emphasize. The use of wrinkling, rubbing, dyeing, and dotting is inflexible, making it difficult to reflect the vivid vitality of traditional ink-wash. In terms of artistic styles, there is a phenomenon of homogeneous styles in some works, lacking distinct and unique characteristics. Taking the works themed on the life scenes in the southwestern ethnic minority areas as an example, the average score given by experts for the uniqueness of their artistic styles is 3.42 points (at the "average" level), with a standard deviation of 0.48. This shows that there is still room for further exploration and innovation in the artistic styles of such themed works.

The integration of realistic sketching and ink wash has significantly enhanced the expressiveness and three-dimensionality of paintings through light-shadow processing and line expression. Take *Guardians of Health* as an example: by applying light-shadow techniques from realistic sketching, the artwork meticulously depicts the interplay of light and shadow on the medical staff's protective clothing, highlighting the fabric's three-dimensional texture. Meanwhile, the combination of ink lines and light-shadow effects vividly captures the figures' movements and postures. In terms of color application, the color theory of realistic sketching has inspired new experiments in ink figure painting. Artists appropriately incorporate colors symbolizing occupational characteristics, which not only emphasize the subjects' professional identities but also infuse the compositions with vibrancy. Statistically, the comprehensive average score for enhancing expressiveness and three-dimensionality through this integration is 4.58 (rated "very good"), with a standard deviation of 0.32.







While realistic sketching has brought positive impacts to Chinese ink figure painting, challenges persist. In the inheritance and innovative application of traditional ink-wash techniques, some works only superficially adopt brushwork: line outlining appears mechanical and rigid, lacking the dynamic variations in pressure and rhythmic charm emphasized in classical ink aesthetics. Techniques such as *cun* (wrinkling), *mo* (rubbing), *ran* (dyeing), and *dian* (dotting) are applied rigidly, failing to convey the lively vitality inherent in traditional ink wash. Regarding artistic styles, homogenization is evident in some works, which lack distinct individuality. For instance, works themed on life scenes in southwestern ethnic minority areas received an average expert score of 3.42 (rated "average") for stylistic uniqueness, with a standard deviation of 0.48. This indicates significant room for further exploration and innovation in developing distinctive artistic languages for such thematic works.

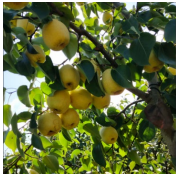
3. Integration and Innovation in the Design and Practice of Chinese Ink Figure Painting Incorporating Realistic Sketching

3.1 Expansion of Creative Themes

Against the backdrop of cultural integration, the creative themes of Chinese ink figure paintings have been significantly expanded. Artists not only focus on traditional cultural themes but also turn their attention to modern social life and cross-cultural fields. Works themed on "workers, farmers, and doctors" vividly showcase the spiritual outlook and life characteristics of these groups. In the creation of the Chinese ink figure painting Farmers' Happy Life with the theme of farmers' images, the artist depicts the joyous scene of farmers' harvest through delicate portrayals. The figures are vivid and full of the flavor of life. The following is about how to extract relevant creative elements in the creation process. (As shown in Table 4)

Table 4 Extraction of the creative elements about the farmer image

Material elements	Picture	Connotative meaning
Completed work and details		
Character image 1		The image of male farmers: showing the simple and industrious image of farmers, etc. His face may be engraved with traces of time due to long-term outdoor work, reflecting the main role of farmers as a labor force in agricultural production, and they are the backbone of agricultural production.
Character image 2		Image of female farmers: it reflects the figure of women in the farmer group, who also contribute to agricultural activities, reflecting the scene of husband and wife participating in work and operating life hand in hand, and represents the qualities of tenacity and diligence.
Character image 3		Children's image: it symbolizes the future and hope of agriculture. The children appear in the image of farmers, implying the inheritance of agricultural production, and the new generation will continue the development of agriculture.
Prop 1		Bamboo basket: it is a common tool when farmers work, used for picking and carrying crops, etc., which reflects the daily life and simplicity of farmers' work, and also symbolizes the carrier of harvest, and has a strong atmosphere of farming culture.
Prop 2		Pear: It represents agricultural products and is the result of farmers' hard work. The harvest of pears symbolizes the return of farmers' efforts, which reflects the harvest and value of agricultural production.

Material elements	Picture	Connotative meaning
Environment		Orchard scene: The orchard is one of the important production places for farmers, showing the specific scene of agricultural production. Pears full of trees create a harvest atmosphere, highlighting farmers' engagement in production activities in such an environment, which is a typical presentation of the agricultural production environment.

3.2 Innovation in Modeling Design

Realistic sketching has brought innovative impetus to the modeling design of Chinese ink figure paintings: on one hand, by integrating the scientific knowledge of human anatomy, it enables artists to accurately grasp the proportional relationships and structural logic of figures, making the represented images more naturally lifelike and dynamically reasonable in posture; on the other hand, its meticulous observational approach to facial expressions—such as the nuanced capture of muscle movements and emotional micro-expressions—allows for the translation of such details into ink language through gradated ink tones and flexible line variations, thereby enriching the emotional expressiveness of figures and transcending the limitations of traditional symbolic depictions to achieve deeper psychological articulation. For example, in the work *The Market on the Back Basket*, the researcher's meticulous portrayal of the characters' facial expressions and ethnic costumes (as shown in Figure 2) deeply reflects the inner world of the characters. In terms of the overall modeling style, the integration of realistic sketching and ink-wash creates a unique artistic effect, which not only retains the charm of ink-wash but also enhances the three-dimensionality and sense of reality of the figures.



Figure 2: Depiction of the Face of a Minority Girl and Her Ethnic Costume

Source: The researcher

3.3 Creative Practice with Specific Themes

Creative practices with themes of "workers, farmers, doctors" and the life scenes in the southwestern ethnic minority areas of China have achieved rich results.









In the work *Aid with the theme of workers*, the artist uses realistic sketching to accurately depict the expressions and movements of workers during the operation. By combining the shades of ink-wash, the artist presents the texture of clothing and the effects of light and shadow. Colors representing vitality and hope are integrated to highlight the occupational characteristics. The central composition method is adopted in the composition, enhancing the sense of depth and creating a tense atmosphere. In the work *High-altitude Beauty*, with the theme of Tibetan women, realistic sketching is used to precisely portray the facial features

and clothing details of Tibetan women. A triptych composition is employed to show their images and lives from multiple dimensions. In terms of brush - and - ink techniques, traditional methods are inherited. The color scheme mainly features black and white, with red accessories as accents, highlighting the style of the clothing.

In facial expression, the nuanced capture of micro-expressions—such as the subtle tension of ocular muscles or the gradated shifts in jawline contours, honed through sketching's focus on light-shadow modeling and linear precision—translates into ink through modulated ink tones and calligraphic line variations. This allows ink figures to convey not just typological emotion but layered psychological states, reflecting how cultural fusion enables the medium to engage with modern humanistic themes. The impact of realistic sketching transcends technical innovation; it exemplifies how artistic traditions evolve through reciprocal influence, where the absorption of foreign techniques—within the framework of cultural fusion—reinvigorates indigenous practices, expanding the expressive boundaries of ink figure painting while preserving its ontological identity as a synthesis of "form" and "vital energy."

These works embody the innovative practice of integrating realistic sketching and Chinese ink figure painting, providing new ideas and directions for the development of Chinese ink figure painting.

Table 5: Example of the creative process

The creation process is diagrammed	Worker theme work "Aid"	Tibetan women's high-altitude Beauty
Conception and sketch		
Chuck and Shop Ink		
Put colour on		
Adjustment and improvement (Final work effect)		

4. Evaluation of the Effect of Realistic Sketching on the Modeling Transformation of Chinese Ink Figure Painting

Through investigations and analyses of experts, curators, gallery directors, and learners, an evaluation was carried out on the effect of realistic sketching on the modeling transformation of Chinese ink figure painting. The results show that in terms of modeling accuracy and artistic expressiveness, the integration of realistic sketching has achieved remarkable results. However, there is still room for improvement in the inheritance and innovative application of traditional ink-wash techniques and the uniqueness of artistic styles. Specifically, the improvement of detail precision by realistic sketching in depicting details such as the hands and feet of workers, farmers, and medical staff has been highly recognized. In the processing of light and shadow and line expression, the enhancement of the expressiveness and three-dimensionality of the painting through the integration of realistic sketching and ink-wash has also received high praise. Some works scored relatively low in terms of the degree of inheritance of traditional ink-wash techniques and the uniqueness of artistic styles, and more exploration is needed in future practices.

Discussion

1. Relationship with Existing Research

This study complements previous research on the development of Chinese ink figure painting and the influence of realistic sketching. Previous studies often focused on the influence during a specific period or on a particular aspect. In contrast, from the perspective of cultural integration theory, this study comprehensively and systematically explores the impact of realistic sketching on the modeling of Chinese ink figure painting. It covers multiple aspects such as the introduction process, stylistic evolution in different development stages, creative practice innovation, and effect evaluation, providing a more comprehensive perspective and in-depth understanding of research in this field.

2. Theoretical and Practical Significance

Theoretically, this study enriches the application of cultural integration theory in the art field. It deeply analyzes the cultural exchanges, collisions, and innovations during the integration of realistic sketching and Chinese ink figure painting, providing a case-based support for understanding the integration mechanisms between different art forms and contributing to the development of art theory.

Practically, it offers specific theoretical guidance and practical references for the creation of Chinese ink figure paintings. It helps artists better grasp the key points of integrating realistic sketching and ink-wash techniques, enabling them to create works with more contemporary and artistic value. For art education institutions, it provides teaching ideas. By incorporating relevant research results into teaching, students' understanding and application abilities of the two art forms can be cultivated, enhancing their artistic literacy and innovation capabilities. For relevant government agencies and cultural and art departments, it provides a basis for formulating policies to promote the inheritance and development of Chinese ink figure painting, which helps to enhance the international influence of Chinese art.

3. Research Limitations and Prospects

This study has certain limitations in research methods and research content. In terms of research methods, expert interviews and literature analysis in qualitative research may be affected by subjective factors. In quantitative research, the samples of the questionnaire survey are mainly concentrated among students from two art academies, with a relatively narrow sample scope, which cannot fully represent the views of all learners and enthusiasts of Chinese ink figure painting. In terms of research content, it mainly focuses on the impact of realistic sketching on the modeling of ink figure painting, with insufficient research on other aspects, such as material innovation and the acceptance mechanism of the art market for integrated works.

Future research can further expand the research samples to include students from art academies at different levels in different regions, as well as social art enthusiasts. It can deeply study the impact of painting material innovation on the integration effect. Moreover, it can strengthen research on the art market, analyze the market demand, price mechanism, and collection trends of works integrating realistic sketching



and Chinese ink figure painting, providing more comprehensive and in-depth research results for the development of Chinese ink figure painting.

Conclusion

Since the 20th century, Chinese ink figure painting has pioneered diverse expressive forms along the path of "East-West integration." With the development of the times and changing aesthetic demands, questions about the development and creation of figure paintings, which emphasize moulding, inevitably relate to the interplay between brushwork and form (Yang, S. 2024). The century-long trajectory of realistic sketching in China, rooted in early 20th-century cultural exchanges, missionary art education, and the intellectual upsurge of the New Culture Movement, has acted as a pivotal catalyst for the modern transformation of ink figure painting. Marked by ideological debates and aesthetic negotiations, this process evolved from initial resistance to its "scientific modeling" during the Republican era to a deliberate synthesis championed by artists like Xu Beihong, who advocated "Sino-Western fusion," and Jiang Zhaohe, whose socially engaged realism exemplified sketching's capacity to deepen ink art's connection to lived experience. Chinese artists gradually forged a symbiotic relationship between sketching's analytical rigor, grounded in anatomical precision and observational discipline, and ink's intuitive expressivity, reshaping both the technical vocabulary of the medium and its cultural mission in an era of global modernity.

This integration represents a dual project of preservation and reinvention: while steadfastly adhering to the philosophical core of traditional ink, such as the ancient principle of "capturing spirit through form," it introduced systematic anatomical study, perspectival space, and documentary observation. The result is a threefold transformation: figure modeling now balances structural accuracy with the lyrical fluidity of brushwork; themes have expanded from the elitist subjects of literati art to include proletarian laborers, medical professionals, and ethnic minority communities; and stylistic outputs range from Xu Beihong's heroic realism to the nuanced contemporary practices that blend sketching's precision with ink's tonal poetry. Yet progress is shadowed by existential tensions: the pursuit of photographic fidelity risks reducing ink washes to mere tools for description, while standardized art education has inadvertently fostered stylistic homogenization, threatening the "ink spirit"—the spontaneous, metaphysical resonance inherent in traditional brushwork.

Creative practices centered on "workers, farmers, doctors" and southwestern ethnic minority life exemplify this dynamic interplay. These works leverage sketching's documentary power to immortalize the physicality of labor or the ceremonial grace of ethnic cultures, yet simultaneously invoke ink's symbolic capacity, through modulated tones and calligraphic lines, to transcend mere representation, capturing the collective psyche of an era. The rough textures of farmers' hands or the concentrated postures of medical staff become allegories of resilience, constructing a visual sociology that bridges the individual and the universal. Their enduring significance, however, depends on avoiding a false dichotomy between realism and tradition; instead, they must evolve into a new idiom where sketching's observational discipline enriches, rather than overshadows, ink's "freehand" essence—the art of distilling reality into evocative, spiritually charged forms.

Interdisciplinary evaluations—integrating art history, technical analysis, and audience reception—reveal a nuanced narrative: while realistic sketching has indisputably elevated ink figure painting's capacity for psychological depth and social engagement, its full potential remains untapped. Modest scores in traditional technique inheritance and stylistic innovation call for a return to the dialectical spirit of China's modern art pioneers, who viewed sketching not as an import but as a dialogic partner in revitalizing indigenous traditions. Future progress lies in exploring how the "anatomical eye" of sketching can coexist with the "spiritual eye" of ink painting—crafting works that are both rooted in material reality and capable of evoking the ineffable. Such a balance would secure ink figure painting's role not only as a vital national tradition but as a universal language of humanistic expression, bridging the technical precision of the modern era with the poetic imagination of Chinese aesthetic philosophy.



Recommendation

1. Guidance for Learners and Inheritors

Those engaged in learning and inheriting Chinese ink figure painting must anchor their practice in tradition. They should systematically delve into the historical context of ink figure painting, mastering the essence of traditional techniques, such as outlining, texturing, rubbing, dyeing, and dotting, through meticulous copying of masterworks by both ancient and modern artists. Building on this foundation, they should actively integrate the scientific modeling principles of realistic sketching: deeply studying human anatomy and perspective, and refining their figurative skills through life drawing. Crucially, they must avoid mechanical application, instead focusing on organically merging the precision of sketching with the freehand expressivity inherent in ink painting.

Learners should also transcend the confines of the studio, immersing themselves in lived experience to capture the spirit of the era and social dynamics, infusing contemporary emotional resonances into their creations. Broadening artistic horizons through cross-cultural engagement and exposure to diverse art forms is essential, enabling them to forge a distinct artistic voice through the dialectic between tradition and modernity.

2. Reforms for Art Education Institutions

Educational institutions must reconfigure curricula to prioritize foundational training in traditional ink tools and techniques for beginners. Once a solid technical base is established, systematic, realistic sketching courses should be introduced to strengthen students' modeling capabilities and brushwork proficiency. Comparative analysis modules can guide students in examining the philosophical and formal disparities between ink painting's expressive idiom and sketching's representational logic, while integrative creation projects foster innovative thinking and practical experimentation.

Regular invitations to established artists—both those rooted in tradition and those pushing innovative boundaries—to conduct lectures and workshops will expand students' artistic perspectives. Courses in Eastern and Western art history should deepen their understanding of ink painting's cultural heritage and sketching's historical evolution, providing a robust intellectual foundation for integrative practice.

3. Cultivating Artistic Creation and Market Ecology

Artists and practitioners must explore the profound convergences between ink's freehand spirit and sketching's realistic rigor, integrating the conceptual depth of ink aesthetics into precise modeling to avoid superficial stylistic hybridity. In the creative process, they should honor cultural inheritance by weaving traditional elements, such as ethnic minority cultures, historical narratives, and philosophical concepts, into modern aesthetic frameworks, thereby showcasing the unique charm of ink painting as a living tradition.

While the integration of Chinese ink drawing exhibits promise in enhancing creativity and aesthetic sensibilities, comprehensive exploration and consideration of long-term impacts in the digital era are warranted (Wang, W., Alli, H., & Saion, I., 2024). When navigating the art market, a balanced approach that upholds artistic integrity while engaging with commercial realities is essential. While exhibitions, auctions, and market analyses can inform creative directions, artists must resist the pull of short-term commercial pressures. The market, in turn, should actively promote integrative works through specialized exhibitions, academic symposia, and public outreach to enhance appreciation for this genre. Establishing evaluation systems that prioritize artistic innovation and cultural depth over mere technical mimicry or trend-chasing will foster a healthy ecosystem, ensuring fair opportunities for artists and preserving the medium's intellectual vitality.

4. Policy and Societal Support for Cultural Continuity

Government agencies and cultural institutions should enhance policy support by establishing dedicated funds for integrative research, providing studio spaces, grants, and mentorship programs for emerging artists, and creating national platforms for exhibitions, residencies, and academic exchanges. These initiatives will foster cross-generational dialogue and the sharing of creative experiences. Internationally, strategic cultural exchanges and touring exhibitions can showcase China's innovative advancements in ink



figure painting, positioning it as a vital contributor to global contemporary art while enhancing its soft power.

Domestically, strengthening art market regulations to combat commercial exploitation and standardize practices will guide the industry toward sustainable growth. Implementing youth-oriented initiatives, such as creation competitions, scholarships, and talent incubation programs, will identify and nurture the next generation of artists, ensuring the continuous evolution of ink figure painting. By balancing tradition with innovation, and technical precision with conceptual depth, these efforts will secure the medium's place as both a cultural treasure and a dynamic force in modern art.

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