

# Rethinking on "subjectivity" and "contemporariness" of Chinese art

**Fang Liu**

Associate Professor, School of Fine Arts, Jiangsu No.2 Normal University, China

**Published:** 30 August 2020

**Copyright** © Liu.

## **Abstract**

Since modern times, the development concept of Chinese Art (refers mainly to Chinese painting) has been constantly challenged by the concepts from western art, and seems to be always in the "subject illusion" of "binary opposition" set by itself. In this process, there are many different artistic views, and even the art problem is raised to the political context. We do not deny the relationship between art and politics, science and technology. There is no doubt that the discussion on this issue is also of great significance and value. Moreover, the historical research on politics, philosophy and science and technology has also benefited us a lot from the development of art. However, if we unable establish the confidence of the cultural subject, all our cognition will probably become the "leftovers" of Western art and the writing of art history forever.

## **Establish the confidence of cultural subject in the new era**

It is very important for us to establish the self-confidence of cultural subject to understand the subjectivity and contemporariness of contemporary Chinese art. Since the last century, Chinese society has been in a complex period of change. Political, economic, cultural and national future, social structure, personal identity and other issues have become several important aspects that have to be seriously considered in the process of exploring their own development. Literary revolution, art revolution, traditional Chinese painting transformation, 85 new trends and other movements have undoubtedly become a potential stream that can not be ignored in social evolution. From them, we can see how artists, theorists, critics and even policy makers of national literature and art

policy are able to judge the situation and lead the development direction of Chinese fine arts. We can imagine that their subjectivity is all based on "national independence, unity and national liberation". National independence means people's independence, and national liberation means individual liberation. In the decades of social development, under the leadership of previous leaders, Chinese society has gradually moved towards a well-off society in an all-round way. The main contradiction in Chinese society has been transformed into the contradiction between the people's growing needs for a better life and the unbalanced and inadequate development. Here, "the need for a better life" presents a variety of multi-level and multi-faceted characteristics, "from spiritual culture to political life, from real social status to psychological expectations, value recognition and other aspects, it puts forward requirements for fairness and justice, common prosperity and even the all-round development of people and social progress.". It is not hard to see that the internal structure of Chinese society and the social psychology of Chinese people will inevitably change with it, and develop to a deeper level, which will affect the development and expression of cultural psychology and artistic psychology. The best embodiment is that literary and artistic works creation, theoretical elaboration and critical position will gradually return to the Chinese body. The noumenon here is the subject of Chinese people under the development of Chinese art culture. On the other hand, the cultural self-confidence of the collective and the self-confidence of the individual subject complement each other; the individual can only be the individual in the collective, and the collective must be the collective based on the individual.

The purpose of the above theoretical elaboration is to explain and present: the subjectivity of Chinese art has shown its uniqueness and universality in the contemporary era, rather than and should not be regarded as the other "subjectivity" of the development of Chinese art in the western context. But even on this point, we can't understand it in isolation and out of context. We must recognize the formation and current situation of the subjectivity of "human" behind the subject of Chinese art, so as to make a better accurate and rational judgment without being in the psychological state of misunderstanding and humility for a long time. The power of this kind of "misunderstanding and modesty" view of art is very small. For example, if we still use the concept of evolution to discuss the relationship between the development of ancient and contemporary art, it seems very inappropriate. Because we know that almost all theories have to go through deconstructive interpretation and understanding in contemporary times. At present, the subjectivity and contemporariness of Chinese fine arts are facing the test from many aspects of thought and theory. In this process, the formation of any development concept is bound to be closely connected with Chinese society.

### **On the contemporary connotation of Chinese art in the new era**

At this point, we can try to ask the specific connotation of "subjectivity" and "contemporariness" of Chinese art in the new era, as well as the question of "what is the relationship between" subjectivity "and" contemporariness ". For the former, combined with the above discussion, we can list several words related to it, which may include "culture", "nation", "state", "identity", etc. In fact, we can find that "subjectivity" basically reflects the horizontal analysis, which is obtained through comparison. That is to say, the subjectivity of Chinese art is formed by dialogue with the culture, nation, country and people of "other places". No matter the implantation of modern western culture or the output of contemporary Chinese culture, it provides a theoretical background for the thinking of "subjectivity" of Chinese art. The contemporariness of Chinese art, on the one hand, can be

understood from the perspective of time. The traditional Chinese view of time and history has changed a lot in modern times, especially the introduction of the western view of evolution development, which makes "modern" and "contemporary" have some life significance. In fact, it is difficult to separate the connotation of "contemporariness" in Chinese context from that in the West. However, from the perspective of the future development vision of the country, the "contemporaneity" of the concept of time is insignificant. We can say that it is precisely because China has a very clear vision and way for the future development that it is able to distance itself from the "contemporariness" in the western context and endow the contemporariness of Chinese art with a rich and powerful connotation of "contemporariness". "History also shows that the choice and reception of" strange taste "in the international context is often determined by the cultural strength of the taste generated in the local area." These connotations of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era will dispel the structure and importance of "subjectivity" in the development of Chinese fine arts. That is to say, when China really establishes a complete and automatic cultural self-confidence, the focus of our discussion will shift from what is the "subjectivity" and "contemporariness" of Chinese art to what is the relationship between them.

From the perspective of the relationship between the two, the "subjectivity" and "contemporariness" of Chinese art are discussed before this, and "subjectivity" is important to "contemporariness", which is reflected in the nationalization, localization of oil painting and the independent road demand for the development of Chinese art. But one thing we may have neglected, in fact, similar to the nationalization or localization of oil painting may no longer be a problem. Although oil painting is a kind of foreign painting, just as Buddhism Statues come from India, it has become an "option" that cannot be deleted in the development of Chinese art, and it has been granted permanent "right to stay". Because, it's not just the introduction of individual painters or their works that has won a new voice. Just as the West will not call Western Ceramics Chinese ceramics, those have become part of their culture, thoughts and psychology. Once these art forms are adopted, they are destined to become new members. At present, we should not treat them as "new". Therefore, although we are still discussing the nationalization and localization of oil painting, there may be more worthy and urgent issues waiting for the thinking of artists and theorists. This is the problem of the transition from "subjectivity" to "contemporaneity" of Chinese art.

When we say that "contemporariness" is more important than "subjectivity", we don't mean that "contemporariness" abolishes "subjectivity", but that when we talk about "contemporariness", we are also talking about "subjectivity". The following aspects provide us with a good explanation. First, the guiding ideology of China's current and future overall literary and artistic creation is to take the people as the center, go deep into life and take root in the people. Here, we can't see the tendency of "subjectivity", more is the contemporary view of literary creation and theory. "People" and "life" have become a new proposition in the development of Chinese fine arts. If we grasp this point, we will undoubtedly grasp the root of "subjectivity" and "contemporariness" of Chinese fine arts. Secondly, the issue of art and science has been discussed for a long time. On the one hand, it shows that this topic is persistent and has not yet reached a consensus; on the other hand, the author is more willing to say from the perspective of "subjectivity" and "contemporariness" of the development of Chinese fine arts. Obviously, "art" and "science" in "art and science" do not belong

to the West or the East. Whether in China or in the west, the topic of "art and science" is not only neutral, but also border less. What they have in common seems to be that it is "contemporary", which is one of the most concerned topics in the development of contemporary art. The "contemporaneity" of art makes it possible for art dialogue across cultures, countries and categories. The "subjectivity" of art gives way to "contemporariness" in different forms. On this point, Beijing International Biennale and other important domestic art activities have responded to this. Beijing International Biennale is a dialogue between Chinese contemporary art and international art. In the new era, this kind of art dialogue shows the formation of the contemporariness of Chinese art and the international context. Through the era theme of "Silk Road civilization", it shows the cultural confidence of Chinese contemporary art. Third, in addition to international exchanges, the current emphasis on the promotion and development of China's excellent traditional culture is another important sign of the "contemporaneity" of Chinese art. As mentioned above, if the "subjectivity" is more from the horizontal perspective, then the "contemporaneity" he rereflects the vertical side. The great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is not the rejuvenation of a certain part or unit, but the overall rejuvenation, including politics, economy, culture, psychology, etc. From the perspective of history, the road to rejuvenation of China's contemporary is the "contemporariness" of China as a whole and the full value embodiment and development significance of the "contemporariness" of China's fine arts. In recent years, China Art Museum, China National Academy of painting and other institutions have organized many art exhibitions with the theme of "freehand brushwork" for cultural exchange and academic research, which has far-reaching value and connotation in the era of mining and promoting the creative transformation and innovative development of Chinese freehand brushwork culture spirit in Contemporary Art creation. The report of the 19th national congress pointed out that "the socialist culture with Chinese characteristics originates from the excellent traditional Chinese culture nurtured by the Chinese nation's 5000 years of civilization." It can be said that the "subjectivity" of Chinese art has been infinitely extended and penetrated here. From history to the present, from China to the world, from subjectivity to the present, it has also completed the process of vertical exploration to horizontal development. From these three aspects, we can see that the relationship between "subjectivity" and "contemporariness" of Chinese art has changed in the contemporary era.

However, this "turn" is not mechanical, but organic and flexible. The overall development of Chinese society has provided a good and rare environment for the development of fine arts, which is obvious to all: stable political environment, rising economic environment, superior cultural environment, etc., all of which have provided different orientation of power resources for this transformation. Chinese art has got rid of passive transformation, introduction and other difficulties, completed its own transformation, and gained the freedom of Chinese art development. This "freedom" state is realized on the basis of thinking about the "subjectivity" of Chinese art. It has multiple forms, such as plastic art, performance art, digital new media art, etc. Secondly, it is not formalized, but has special connotation. Far from that, since the 1970s, formalism has not become a problem that has already been solved because of the gradual disappearance of the discussion voice at that time. On the other hand, the problem of form is not only the problem of Chinese art noumenon, but also the result of the dialogue between China and Western art. Therefore, the "subjectivity" of Chinese art has become an inevitable topic, and the "contemporaneity" of Chinese art is still on the edge. With the development of Chinese society and

the transformation of international relations, the development of Chinese fine arts has embarked on the road of "independent development". On the one hand, Chinese fine arts are no longer exclusive or closed, but put the contemporary development of Chinese Fine Arts in the context of globalization, and absorb the excellent art nutrients of other countries and nations in the world with an open and inclusive attitude; on the other hand, they are not in self abasement or looking at the eyes of others, it is easy to explore the contemporary direction of human art development from China's historical context and local cultural experience. That is to say, the subjectivity of Chinese art has become a self-evident existence. More importantly, we have the right of interpretation and discourse of "contemporaneity" of Chinese art. To obtain this right of discourse, we have to practice on the basis of the existence of subjectivity, because it is no longer mechanical, single and formalized, but has the unique values of contemporary Chinese humanistic thought, development concept and creative spirit. Therefore, it can be said that the contemporariness of Chinese art is based on subjectivity.

### **Creating classic works of art in the new era**

With the right of discourse to interpret the connotation of Chinese art in the new era, we can not do without art works, not to mention classic art works. Every nation has its own classic works, and every era should have its own. With the enhancement of China's comprehensive national strength, the way of telling Chinese stories to the world through Chinese art is becoming more and more diverse, and more and more recognized by Chinese people and the world. Among them, the most typical is that the "Shi Qu Bao Ji" series exhibition and the "A Thousand Miles of Rivers and Mountains" exhibition launched by the Palace Museum have attracted a large number of audience to watch in line, which is spectacular; the "collection activation" series exhibition launched by the China Art Museum has also been popular among the public, especially the "beauty in the new era-Celebrating the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress of China" The "special exhibition of fine art museum collections" has a daily audience of more than 10000 people, far more than the official pre-ception. Classic works are sought after by the audience not because of the promotion of the media or the strong promotion of the organizers, but because the essence of the exhibition in the name of classics is needless to say. Their aesthetic and cultural characteristics have been engraved in people's memories and become a part of life, life and memory. In response, He Dingding commented in the people's Daily: "when more and more people see the excellent Chinese culture, cultural confidence has a deeper foundation. In this sense, "beauty is in the new era", that is, let beauty always be. "That is to say, the foundation of cultural self-confidence is solid, which is inseparable from the launch of Chinese cultural boutiques. At the same time, boutique culture should be constantly displayed to the audience to meet people's yearning for a better life and meet people's growing demand for spiritual life. This is the essential element of "subjectivity" and "contemporariness" of Chinese art in the new era.

Create classics for the people. No matter the ancient Chinese painting treasures of the palace museum or the works of famous artists from modern times displayed in the Chinese Art Museum, they are undoubtedly the art classics of the Chinese nation. General secretary Xi Jinping pointed out at the Symposium on literature and art that "socialist literature and art, in essence, is the literature and art of the people". Literary classics are deepened and sublimated in the constant spread of the people, under the infinite infection of the people, in the repeated chanting of the

people. Creating classics for the people is not the purpose of creation, but the method of creation. Only around the people can we be recognized by the people, the nation and history. People are the carrier of life, but also the life itself. If Chinese contemporary art creation is separated from the subjectivity of the "people" and the contemporariness of the "people", it will also be separated from life, self and the emotional expression of beauty.

The people create the classics of the times. The classic works of art in the new era inevitably contain the subjectivity and contemporariness of Chinese contemporary art. The classic works of famous scholars in ancient and modern China are fascinating because they embody the aesthetic creation of those times. To watch the classics, such as facing the ancients, this mysterious spiritual experience can only be transmitted on the same aesthetic hub. That is to say, as long as we have the subjectivity and contemporariness of Chinese contemporary art, we can create Chinese art works with subjectivity and contemporariness. The key to this cycle is to create the classics of the new era.

In the final analysis, the development process of Chinese art is the existence process of "subjectivity". The contemporariness of Chinese art embodies the creation of Chinese artists and art theorists on the social, national, people and life emotions. The contemporariness of Chinese art is the result of self-reflection on Chinese ontology, Chinese art ontology rather than "subjectivity", which not only answers "who are we?" Where do we come from? More importantly, this "contemporariness" answers "where are we going?".