

The Influence of Islamic Culture on the Color of Local Oil Painting Creation in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region (Xinjiang for short)

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Abstract:

Oil painting activities are closely related to painters' living environment and traditional cultural background. Xinjiang oil painters' mastery of color in oil painting creation is closely related to the traditional color aesthetic tendency formed by their traditional culture. Among it, the influence of Islamic aesthetic culture is an important link. This paper focuses on the development of Islamic culture and the characteristics of its architectural art, and discusses the influence of Islamic aesthetic culture on the color of local oil paintings in Xinjiang by means of iconology research, comprehensive analysis of literature and field investigation. The research in this regard will bring some enlightenment and ideas to the local painting creation in Xinjiang, especially to the contemporary painting color creation in Xinjiang, with important practical significance and academic value.

Keywords: Xinjiang; Islam; Color; Oil painting creation; Mosque.

I. INTRODUCTION

With a unique geographical location, Xinjiang has always occupied an important position in the history of cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries. Art in the western region of China has always been in the vortex of communication and collision among the Han culture in the central plains of China, the nomadic culture in the north, the Buddhist culture in South Asia and the Arab-Islamic culture. With its own unique style, it has occupied a special position in the development of Chinese art and become an important part of Chinese art.

Throughout the ages, Xinjiang, with its unique geographical advantages and unique regional cultural phenomena, has a great attraction to scholars at home and abroad. For example, British Bauer, Swedish Sven Heding, British Stein, French pelliot, German Grundl and Lekirk, Japanese Otani, Russian Dmitry Clements, etc., all came to Xinjiang to "explore" and conducted cultural studies focusing on Buddhist art. At home, Huang Wenbi, Su Bai, Wu Zhen, Wang Binghua and other gentlemen have done in-depth research on Xinjiang's history and culture, and trained a large number of researchers. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Institute of Cultural Relics Preservation and Archaeology was set up, effectively protecting and studying the historical and cultural resources of Xinjiang. Besides, a large number of experts and scholars emerged, providing us with rich academic works. Zhong Gao's *General*

Theory of Art in the western region and Wang Rong's *History of Art in the western region* are the masterpieces of Xinjiang's art research. They use iconography, anthropology, ethnology, psychology and other theoretical methods to explore the ontological significance of art in the western region, which not only integrate the overall appearance, but also cut into the micro perspective; Shang Yanbin's *Western Region Culture* mainly discusses the formation and development of the western region culture from eight parts: the geographical and cultural background of the western region, the convergence of ethnic groups and multiculturalism in the western region, the radiation of foreign culture to the western region, the exchange of Chinese culture and western culture, the formation of western culture and ancient Uyghur civilization, the material cultural features and folk customs of the western region, the religious culture of the western region, and the ancient characters of ethnic groups in the western region; *Xinjiang Uygur Architectural Patterns* compiled by Liu Dingling and Zhang Xiangde, *Collection of Uygur Architectural Art Patterns* compiled by Liu Dingling, *Uygur Decorative Patterns* compiled by Zhang Xiangde, etc; Li An-ning's book *Xinjiang Folk Art* is mainly about the research of patterns, costumes and murals of ethnic minorities in Xinjiang. From the angle of art techniques and formal features, the introduction and analysis of contemporary folk art of Xinjiang ethnic minorities is an important work of Xinjiang art theory circle for the study of ethnic minority art in Xinjiang; Wang Zu's *Homecoming of Nomads* narrates the history of Altay, Turpan, Kuqa, Kashgar, Hotan and Tashkurgan; the work of Sun Dawei et al. *Ancient Art Collection of Xinjiang* introduces the ancient painting, sculpture and architecture in Xinjiang. The research results of these ancient and modern scholars have accumulated valuable materials for our research. However, the existing academic works mainly focus on the history of cultural exchange and development and the folk culture, local conditions and customs in Xinjiang. Most of them discuss the economy, culture, religion and art, but rarely involve the research of regional cultural characteristics and painting resources of Xinjiang.

Moreover, there are many discussions about the thinking of native painting of Xinjiang. In the article *Strive for the Creation of Uyghur Oil Painting Style* [1], Abdul Klimu Nasreldin talks about the relationship between art creation and folk art based on his own creative practice; in his article *The Artist's Native Consciousness* [2], he analyzes the native consciousness of the artist and expounds his creative view; Qin Tianxing emphasizes that Xinjiang painting should be based on local resources and excavate the national artistic language and spiritual connotation in his papers *An Analysis of the Present Situation of Xinjiang Contemporary Painting and the Hindering Factors of its Development*" [3]. Wang Guangxin's paper *The Art of Nature and the Nature of Art-Reflections on the Creation of Contemporary Oil Paintings in Xinjiang* [4] discusses nature, art, nationality and modernity, emphasizing the exploration of the true meaning of art from the depths of life; Liu Jianxin analyzes the color and aesthetic characteristics of peasant paintings in Makit, Xinjiang in his paper *Decorative Characteristics and Visual Psychology of Peasant Paintings in Makit, Xinjian* [5]; in the article *Happiness Wisdom and Color* [6] written by Irmjan Abdure Yimu, from the perspective of the development of human history, it is analyzed that different ethnic groups have formed different color aesthetics and their respective symbolic colors because of different political, economic, legal, moral and cultural factors; through the analysis of color concept in Yusuf Khass Hajib's book *Happiness Wisdom*, this paper expounds the relationship between the color concept of Uygur and the four elements (fire, gas, water and earth). Irmjan Abdure Yimu further talks about the relationship between color art and aesthetic concept, folk psychology, and customs and habits in

the article *An Analysis of the White Concept of Uygur* [7]. It is believed that under the influence of diversified cultural background and the blending and conflict of various color aesthetic thoughts, the Uyghurs are constantly forming their own concept of white, that is, their unique aesthetic emotion and aesthetic tendency of white; Shi Jiong made a deep analysis of Xinjiang's unique painting resources and painting principles through the article *Principles of Painting and Three Characteristics of Xinjiang Landscape Paintings* [8], and answers the colorful features of Xinjiang landscape paintings; Shan Hongkui's article *Do Oil Painters Like to Ask Themselves Questions?* [9] analyzes the present situation, painting resources and diverse cultural characteristics of Xinjiang's oil painting, and puts forward the method to walk out the way of their own characteristics.

Therefore, it is vitally necessary to analyze the formation and development of local color aesthetics in Xinjiang on the basis of the study of Islamic aesthetic culture from the perspective of contemporary oil painting creation in Xinjiang

II. THE RETURN OF ISLAM FOR THE PRAGMATIC COLOR AESTHETIC VIEW

Historically, people in the western region of China believed in many religions. Except Nestorianism and Zoroastrianism, Shaman, Mani, Buddhism and Islam were basically all people's beliefs. These religions have influenced and changed secular life forms to a great extent, especially Islam from the 10th century to the present. In the 7th century, Islam first came into being and spread among Arab nomadic tribes. In the desert-dominated Arab region, green symbolizes life and hope. It has become the traditional color of Arab Muslims and is regarded as the sacred color by Islam. Islam denies the principle of artistic iconology, rejects concrete paintings and sculptures, and advocates abstract ornamentation. From the perspective of painting language, this "principle of denying artistic iconology" inevitably requires strengthening the decorative color to strengthen artistic iconology and achieve the purpose of conveying the doctrine.

There has been a lot of practices on plastic arts in the history of Uygur nationality, especially in Turpan-Kuqa region. The techniques of figure modeling in Buddhist grottoes have been very perfect, and the application of lines and colors has reached a very high level. However, after accepting Islam, it obviously turned to emphasize practical functions. Seen from the murals of Baizi Creek, it is very close to the painting level of Han nationality at that time in terms of shape and color application. It can be said that in the Uighur period in Gaochang, painting in western region already had quite mature expressive techniques. However, they did not develop a real painting art for appreciation and evaluation according to this road, but returned to arts and crafts production with practical functions as the leading factor. The fundamental reason is that influenced by Islam, the painting art in Xinjiang after Islamization completely abandons the motif of human figure in the subject matter to eliminate all the factors that are not conducive to the spread of Islam. To some extent, this limits artists' modeling ability to express people and animals. However, people's potential artistic talents have not been completely obscured, and their more artistic expressions have gradually turned to plant patterns. In this respect, people still show extraordinary artistic talent and color sense. People began to use flower patterns, geometric patterns and water ripples to color. Through the color contrast technique, the pure color effect and complementary color contrast are

intentionally strengthened, which makes the overall color tone have a strong visual aesthetic feeling and creates a bright and gorgeous picture effect. This emphasis on the contrast effect between solid color and complementary color is usually an important means of expression in Xinjiang's oil painting. It aims at strengthening the overall feeling of the picture and highlighting the main performance objects. Some Xinjiang oil painters often use strong brushstrokes and heavy colors to deal with the bright parts of objects, so as to achieve striking and vivid effects. This method is also in line with the law of color. Under the irradiation of light, the color accumulated through strong strokes is often easier to form reflection, and it is also easier to enter the visual observation area of people, so that people can get visual impression more quickly. The colors of Xinjiang's oil painting pay more attention to the treatment and grasp of the plane composition of color blocks, mainly by improving the color purity, strengthening the complementary color contrast, cold and warm contrast, color block area contrast and other techniques. The strong and heavy color effect is different from the light color in the mainland. At the same time, some artists use a lot of black in pictures, which also shows the traditional color habits of the western region. (Figure 1)



Figure 1 Abdukrimu Nasreldin's *Daolangwu Daolangle*

Of course, this kind of painting method is not unique to Xinjiang's oil painting, but it is more prominent in Xinjiang's oil painting art, resulting in a distinctive feature, which to some extent is also secretly consistent with the Islamic decorative art style.

When talking about the whole Arab-Islamic art, Gombrich said, "We can finally attribute those fine designs and rich color schemes to Muhammad, who drives the artists and makes things that leave the real world enter the dream world of lines and colors. " [10] For Islam, the color settings in religious places and life are not only the source of design inspiration and aesthetic pleasure. They mainly allow Muslims have a deeper understanding of Islamic culture and history. Islam has clear requirements for the colors of religious places, such as the requirement that the outer walls of mosques and mazas must be blue, green, white and other cool colors as the main basic colors to reflect the solemn effect. Arabs advocate white, black and green, which have become the favorite colors of Muslims all over the world. Islam is a secular religion. In the Qur'an, where Islam is paramount, Muslim customs such as clothing and food are clearly defined. In

the Qur'an, Muhammad, the founder of Islam, said to the parishioners, "You should wear white clothes. They are your best clothes." The white hat of Hui nationality originates from the Qur'an. This custom has been deposited in the aesthetic consciousness of Muslims for generations, and it has also achieved the aesthetic psychology of the Islamic nation advocating white. Black gives people a sense of solemnity, simplicity and modesty. The belief in black by the Muslim people in Xinjiang, like their belief in white, mainly comes from the custom of advocating black by Arabs, the birthplace of Islam in the Middle Ages. In the history of Islam, the flag of the Abbas Dynasty in the Arab Empire was black, showing that it was the orthodox successor of Muhammad. Chinese history books have records of "Dashi people in white", "Dashi people in black" and "Dashi people in green". "Dashi people" is the Chinese transliteration of the ancient Persian appellation for Arabs. Nowadays, a black stone (al-Hajar al-Aswad) is placed in the holy temple where Muslims pray every day. It is said that it is used to count down the return time of Adam and Eve (or it is also said that it is the stone of the Kaaba built by the holy man Ibrahim). It is said that Muhammad kissed the stone when he placed it, and now pilgrims follow suit and kiss it (or touch it or raise their hands to the Blackstone) because such a process is regarded as a kind of trust and respect for Muhammad. Green is the color of awe. It is often cited as the symbol of Islam. The main base color of the Islamic flag is green. Green is a sacred color. The binding line of the Qur'an (the holy book of Muslims) and the silk satin cover with Sufi saints are usually green. It is also said that green is feared because Muhammad used to wear green clothes. In Islamic culture, green is the color that describes heaven. The Qur'an describes the life after death, saying, "They wear golden bracelets and green robes of fine silk brocade buried with gold thread, and they will be 'placed on green cushions and beautiful carpets'". The worship of blue also has a deep tradition in Islam. In the Middle East, blue is a protected color, and you can find it in many famous mosques. These famous blue mosques are usually distributed in Afghanistan, Malaysia, Egypt and other countries.

In a word, after Islam was introduced into the western region, it had a profound influence on all aspects of people's lives. Aesthetically, an aesthetic orientation different from that of Buddhism has been formed, which opposes idolatry and drawing everything with eyes. In the end, the painting returned to the emphasis on decoration before the Buddhism period, forming a color decoration style with unique aesthetic characteristics of Islamic culture.

III. THE ARCHITECTURAL COLOR OF ISLAMIC MOSQUE HAS PROMOTED THE WIDE SPREAD OF ITS COLOR AESTHETICS

After Islam was introduced into Xinjiang in the tenth century, it gained popularity among Uighurs. Uyghur Islamic mosque buildings include worship temples, holy tombs and religious halls. There are worship temples in almost every village. Although the general layout is free, the worship halls must be located in the west and face the east, so that when the believers pray to the shrine on the wall behind the worship halls, they also face the holy temple in Mecca, Arabia. Holy tombs, also known as "Maza", are the bury place of religious figures who have contributed to Islam. The Islamic buildings have wonderful shape, gorgeous decoration and distinctive features.

Monique Mayar, a scholar, pointed out when talking about the temples in ancient Gaochang Kingdom that "the scarcity of materials is covered up by rich painting decoration, and painting can quickly make the interior of a temple luxurious at a low price." [11] Islamic mosques are no exception. The 6th century before Islam was the heyday of Byzantine mosaics, and palaces, churches and private houses had to decorate the ground and walls with mosaics. From concept to practice, this kind of mosaic highlights the preference for precious materials. The composition is dense without leaving any blank, and the colors are magnificent. Small colored stones or mosaics and gold are used to create glittering and gorgeous effects. Muslims, who originated in desert areas, absorbed this concept and performance characteristics, and applied it to the architectural decoration of Islamic mosques, which had far-reaching influence. In Islamic mosque buildings, artists always love gorgeous, dense and bright visual effects and follow Islamic teachings. For example, it is required that the external walls of mosques and Maza should be mainly composed of cool colors such as blue, green and white. Blue-green glazed tiles should be used as the main colors, with exquisite designs and solid colors such as blue, green, white and red instead of blended colors. The contrast of tone, lightness and warmth rather than harmony should be used. (Figure 2) Emphasis on the contrast between solid color and complementary color is usually an important method in Xinjiang's oil painting, aiming at strengthening the overall feeling of the picture and highlighting the main performance objects. Some Xinjiang oil painters often use strong brushstrokes and heavy colors to deal with the bright parts of things, so as to achieve striking and vivid effects. This method is also in line with the law of color. Under the irradiation of light, the color accumulated through strong strokes is often easier to form reflection, and it is easier to enter the visual observation area of people, so that people can get visual impression more quickly. This kind of painting method is very prominent in Xinjiang's oil painting art, so that it forms a distinctive feature, which to some extent is also secretly consistent with the Islamic decorative art style. Bright colors have eye-catching gorgeous visual effects. They can give people a strong spiritual attraction or mystery, and convey an optimistic and enthusiastic feeling of life rhythm. In addition, like Islam's strong ability of integration, Islamic architectural decoration art began to use the positive red color from the Chinese culture in the central plain in the mosque wall decoration in the process of localization in Xinjiang. It also shows that Uighur artists' ability of integration and openness can be regarded as the most striking case of localization and innovation of Arab art. Moreover, the more recent the mosque decoration is, the more it can reflect this point. For example, Yining Flower Temple, Atushi Masiti Mosque and some buildings have large areas of positive red. [12]

The colorful artistic decoration of Islamic mosques has a lasting influence on the formation of the color characteristics of Xinjiang's oil paintings. For example, to enhance the visual effect of the brick carving pattern of Islamic architecture, the metropolis uses a large area of bright solid color as the background to highlight the main ornamentation. Color matching is mainly based on complementary colors, with people's favorite white, green, cyan, and gold. To make the tone rich and changeable, highlight the gorgeous colors, and achieve purpose of being striking and vivid, people are used to using colors such as red and green, purple and gold mutually. This feature can also be seen in Xinjiang's oil paintings. Generally speaking, Xinjiang's oil paintings pay great attention to the saturation of colors, the matching relationship between color blocks, the strong contrast tones, and the vibrant colors.

The wide distribution of Islamic mosque buildings makes its color view widely displayed, and finally accelerates its spread. To be sure, the artistic concept of architectural color of Islamic mosque has also been deeply rooted in the aesthetic thinking of Xinjiang artists. Oil painting is an art category that pays attention to color language. The preference of oil painting creation in color application is also closely related to its traditional aesthetics. The aesthetic concept of color application in Islamic architecture will naturally affect oil painting art. From some specific pictures, we can see that it doesn't just focus on the structure and light and shade of things, but highly summarizes the shape on the basis of overall realism. In European classical painting, the background of the picture is often turned into dark brown tone to highlight the main body and also to express the change of light and shadow. We usually call it "soy sauce tone". In Xinjiang's oil painting, it is seldom treated like this, but it is expressed through national decoration. This makes the picture more expressive. On the premise of respecting the objective characteristics of things, it also incorporates subjective emotional feelings, so that the picture can achieve the perfect unity of subjectivity and objectivity, and the artistic expression has both the real source of life and the artist's own unique creation. For example, in the work *Lullaby* by Klim Nasr (Figure 3), the painter doesn't treat the background into dark and heavy tones, nor does he treat a large area of the background in a flat way. Instead, he uses ethnic decorations for background treatment. The whole work takes continuous color changes to make the whole and part of the picture reflected in a clever transition. The overall handling is ingenious and appropriate, which makes people gasp in admiration.



Figure 2 Tomb of Yossef



Figure 3 *Lullaby* by Klim Nasr

IV. CONCLUSION

The formation of aesthetic concept is initially a direct reflection of people's living environment. With the improvement of human cognition level and production capacity, we have gradually mastered some natural laws. Furthermore, it rose to religion and culture, and has been followed up to this day after complicated communication and integration.

Xinjiang's unique regional resource environment provides us with unique visual aesthetic conditions and rich and unique painting resources for oil painting color creation. In this land, a number of outstanding oil painters have emerged, and their paintings have unique visual aesthetic and painting means of local painters, including modeling means and color means. Especially in color, from their paintings, we can feel the unique color aesthetic and performance characteristics of Xinjiang, which profoundly reflects that Xinjiang is especially influenced by the four cultural systems covering the central plain of China, India,

Greece and Islam. Xinjiang's profound historical and cultural accumulation provides us with abundant reference materials for further research. Among them, Islamic religious culture and its architectural form have deeply influenced the color orientation of contemporary local oil painting in Xinjiang.

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