A Comparison between Chinese and Western Paintings

Tiantian Hou*
Xianyang Normal University, Xianyang 712000, Shaanxi Province, China

ABSTRACT
This paper attempts to explore the differences between Chinese and Western paintings by comparing the artworks of different painters. Through the analysis of a series of elements, such as color, composition, and painting tools, of specific works, this paper reveals the differences in the ideological connotations of eastern and western paintings.

KEYWORDS: Chinese painting; Western painting; Painting comparison

1. Introduction
Art has been a part of people’s lives from the beginning of human activity. Music and dance express people’s thoughts and feelings through time and are not easily preserved. More architecture and painting works are left as space is used to express thoughts and emotions. Chinese and Western paintings have a long history and have evolved over time. People have left paintings wherever accessible, such as on stones, walls, and paper. Paintings can help us understand people’s thoughts, which is extremely valuable. As a result of the cultural differences between Chinese and Western people, their paintings are highly distinct. In the following section, we will show you how to evaluate the works of some artists, so that you can appreciate the differences between Chinese and Western paintings in terms of the tools, materials, and techniques used, as well as their artistic conceptions.

2. Discussion
2.1. Difference in tools and materials
The tools and materials used in Chinese ink painting are unique to China, such as brush, rice paper, and ink (Figure 1). Chinese painting necessitates the use of brush to absorb ink, the addition of a certain amount of water to adjust the depth of color, and then drawing on rice paper. Rice paper is a type of paper that absorbs water well, so it requires felt to be laid under it for water absorption. The development of Chinese painting materials, as well as their improvement and even modifications, are not without cause; they all have a cultural context. The use and choice of materials are influenced by the degree of production at that time, the cultural and artistic needs of the society at that time, spiritual worship, as well as the demands of art itself. The humanistic significance of artistic materials lies in these relations. Material and culture refer to
the relationship between material and spirit, which is diametrically opposed but interacting. A dual connection exists between the whole and a part. Painting materials promote the development of art and culture, and culture endows painting materials with greater cultural significance. First of all, the innate human nature of loving beauty and yearning for beauty is the impetus for the development of art and materials. In view of the emphasis on the literati temperament and the popularization of art, these beautiful ideals promote the development of art, resulting in a chain reaction, which refines art materials. From silk to paper, the emergence of ink and wash painting can be said to be a result from people’s diverse aesthetic demands, coupled with the advancement of technology. Second, the increase in productivity as well as scientific and technological progress have played a direct role in promoting the development of art materials. Without the craftsman’s unique tools for improvement, it is difficult to demonstrate an artist’s ingenuity.

The tools used in Western oil painting include oil brush, oil canvas, frame, oil paint, etc. (Figure 2). First, the painter mixes paint and oil with a brush and then paints on the canvas. The canvas needs to be secured with a wooden frame. Oil paint has a strong overlay and can be repeatedly modified. The most important materials and tools for oil painting are pigments and oils. Pigments can be divided into mineral pigments and synthetic pigments. The first pigments were mostly mineral pigments, grounded by hand to form fine powder that is blended during painting. In modern times, pigments are produced in batches by factories and packaged in tin tubes. The types of pigments available are increasing. The properties of pigments are related to their chemical constituents, and certain pigments can cause adverse reactions when toning. Therefore, having an understanding of the properties of pigments will help to make the most of oil painting skills and ensure the color lasts for a long time. Turpentine is a volatile medical oil that can be odorous or odorless. In the preparation of oil paintings, it serves to dilute pigments. It will be completely volatile one or two minutes after luster. Mixing turpentine and oil in proportion will help it to dry faster and give a brighter color.
2.2. Difference in expression techniques

Several works of famous Chinese and Western painters will be discussed in this section. The traditional technique of ink and wash used in Chinese painting reflects the image by presenting the variations of ink color in different shades of being wet and dry on rice paper, which is not only vivid but also captivating. Western oil paintings use different colors to depict scenes in everyday life, in which the colors are vibrant and realistic. Figure 3 shows a painting of shrimps painted by the famed Chinese painter Qi Baishi at the age of 88. This painting depicts three shrimps; the form of the shrimps and their flexible state of moving in the water are vividly expressed with only a few strokes. Although there is not a drop of water in the image, one is able to sense the shrimps swimming. This is the appeal of Chinese painting: the artist’s use of adept and exceptional skills to represent oneself. Using water and ink, this expression technique is mainly portrayed on traditional Chinese painting rice paper. In Chinese painting, ink can produce a unique effect when it encounters water on rice paper. Although it appears to be simple, it can take up to 10 years of practice to achieve such an effect.
The painting “Dream” by Pablo Picasso, one of the most famous Western painters, is shown in Figure 4. Only lines and outlines are used to depict the feminine figure, which is shown against a crimson backdrop. The figure is not analyzed further and is somewhat exaggerated. The colors are also extremely simple. It is the product of complete image freedom – a masterpiece of unrestricted line and color combinations. Picasso used a simple painting to depict a girl in both dream and reality, and his unique approach in expression gives space for imagination and freedom of thought. His paintings belong to the school of Western cubism, using dots, lines, and planes, as well as the interspersed relationship between black and white, grey, and other colors to portray the painted images, giving people a sense of space and freedom. The primary emotion elicited by the expression technique embodies the artworks of cubism and Picasso.

They are both masters: one is a Chinese painter who uses traditional ink painting techniques, while the other is a Western cubist painter who expresses the composition techniques of dots, lines, and planes. When the works of the two techniques collide, it gives a different feeling, reflecting the difference between Chinese and Western paintings.

A set of images will be used to discuss the differences between Chinese and Western painting techniques. The subject matter is the same in these paintings; that is, horses. Horses are revered in China. They symbolize a sense of freedom and spiritual power. In China, there is a saying about “dragon-horse spirit.” That is precisely what it implies [1]. Figure 5 shows a painting of a galloping horse by Xu Beihong, a famous Chinese painter. Similar to the ink painting by Qi Baishi, he also used traditional Chinese painting techniques to express, but the only difference is that he combined the expression techniques of Western painting and integrated it with traditional Chinese painting techniques to create a unique technique and artistic style. This galloping horse contains traditional Chinese brush and ink elements, as well as Western painting elements, such as light and shadow, sketching, perspective, and anatomy. This represents a fusion of Chinese and Western painting techniques, creating a new style of painting.
Figure 5. Galloping Horse by Xu Beihong

Figure 6. Whistlejacket by Stubbs

Figure 6 shows a painting of a horse by the famous Western painter Stubbs. This painting is expressed by the unique Western painting technique. The horse in the painting is exactly the same as a real-life horse, the color structure and perspective relationship is accurate, and it exudes authenticity. This is a unique expression technique of Western painting, which is completely different from the traditional Chinese painting technique. This painting technique is known as realism [2].

2.3. Difference in artistic conception and thematic ideas
If the first two points are the fundamental differences between Chinese painting and oil painting, then the last point is the difference between the essence of Chinese and Western paintings; that is, the difference in the spirit of each art form. We will be using the works of Huang Binhong and Monet to illustrate this point. Figure 7 shows an ink landscape painting by Huang Binhong, a famous Chinese painter. Upon viewing, one may wonder why the landscape is a mass of black ink. In fact, it is not. This is the charm of traditional Chinese painting in China. It reflects the feelings of a literati. What painters often depict is the landscape in their hearts, which they express through a natural and realistic scenery. By examining the top of the mountain, it can be appreciated that different points, lines, surfaces, and ink colors were used by the painter to represent the mountain’s undulating contour. In the lower part of the painting, figures and houses were drawn to express the artistic conception. This reflects a typical traditional Chinese landscape painting technique. The most essential aspect is that it depicts a unique literati painting mood of Chinese painting and the landscape theme within the painter’s heart.
Figure 7. Spring Mountain Tour Map by Huang Binhong

Figure 8 shows a colored-landscape work by a famous Western impressionist, Monet. Although it is also a landscape painting, Monet’s landscape is rich in color, the tones are lively, and the painting carries a vibrant flavor. Oil paintbrush and different colors were used by the artist to express the true form of the objective object. His paintings tend to express objective objects, and the artistic conception and themes conveyed are often completely opposite from those of Chinese landscape paintings [3].

Figure 8. Water Lilies by Monet
3. Conclusion
Chinese ink painting not only conveys the image of the object being painted through traditional Chinese brush and ink, but also, more importantly, the thoughts and emotions of the artist’s inner world \(^4\). Out of spiritual sentiments, traditional Chinese art and culture are expressed through ink and wash. Western oil painting, on the other hand, depicts real objects seen by the human eye, which is the manifestation of objective existence, and is thus closer to the scene \(^5\).

By comparing the works of Chinese and Western painting masters, several conclusions can be drawn. First, whether it is a difference in tools and materials, in expression techniques, or in artistic conception and thematic ideas, they all represent the cultural and artistic differences between Chinese and Western cultures. The aforementioned three points are merely the outcomes of this discussion. Through the comparative analysis of the artworks of Chinese and Western painting masters, we can intuitively reflect the differences in the paintings themselves, as well as the differences between Chinese and Western arts. In any case, the different art forms of Chinese and Western paintings represent their own cultures. We should respect each other, understand one another, learn from each other, advance together, and promote the development of art and culture for art knows no boundaries!

Funding
Basic Scientific Research Funds of Provincial Universities in 2021 “Research on Mausoleum Art of Han and Tang Dynasties in Guanzhong from the Perspective of Normal Art Education” (Project Number: XSYK21007).

Disclosure statement
The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

Publisher’s note
Whioce Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.