

Thoughts on the Application of Sui and Tang Buddhist Intangible Heritage Aesthetic Elements in Modern Art Teaching

Yunhou Ding

School of Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong, China

Abstract: The Sui and Tang Dynasties are two great achievements of classical Asian art, especially in the field of Buddhist cultural heritage. The characteristics of the aesthetics in this period include soft-edged linear brushstrokes, bright mineral colours and deep sculptural grace, and they have accumulated rich artistic and historical connotations. Research is being conducted on the use of aesthetic elements in Sui and Tang Buddhist intangible cultural heritage for contemporary art teaching. Critique of the current excessive reliance on rigid Western academic paradigms and a proposal to systematically integrate indigenous visual culture into the curriculum. Based on the analysis of the historical and aesthetic features of these works, it is believed that they will help students develop their minds and sense of culture. In addition, the paper puts forward some feasible teaching measures, such as tactile exploration of traditional mineral materials, analysis and copying of mural compositions, and contemporary digital reinterpretation of classical patterns. Finally, the combination will promote the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage and cultivate all-round, culturally rich modern art education.

Keywords: Sui and Tang Dynasties; Buddhist Art; Intangible Cultural Heritage; Aesthetic Elements; Modern Art Teaching; Visual Pedagogy.

1. Introduction

The development of modern art education has reached a certain stage in the 21st century. With the spread of globalisation, many educational institutions are now facing the problem of how to integrate the new universal standards of art education with rich local historical traditions. For many years, the main schools of art education around the world have been Western academic schools, which focus on rigid geometrical perspective, anatomical accuracy and the scientific handling of light and shadow. Although the above teaching ideas have certainly helped students develop good observation skills, they have also failed to integrate the rich and varied aesthetic philosophies of non-Western cultures. Therefore, an increasing number of movements in educational theory have begun to propose a major overhaul of the curriculum, which will actively incorporate indigenous intangible cultural heritage to cultivate a more all-encompassing and culturally sensitive artistic literacy.

Among the most exceptional repositories of such heritage are the Buddhist art works of the Sui and Tang dynasties. During this period, the old trade routes saw an all-out display of cross-cultural interaction and thus experienced a rich blending of art from various places. The aesthetic features that have emerged in this period are not fixed historical objects but rather living expressions of high-level intangible cultural heritage. Careful preparation of natural mineral pigments, skilled execution of fluid and rhythmic line drawings, and the deep spiritual monumentality of the sculptures together constitute an aesthetic system. By introducing these classic elements into the modern art classroom, we aim to protect the endangered traditional techniques from becoming obsolete and, at the same time, provide contemporary students with a profound new language of pictures for expressing their own modern life.

This paper hopes to offer all-encompassing research on

how to apply the aesthetic elements of Sui and Tang Buddhist intangible cultural heritage effectively and meaningfully in modern art education. Systematically analyse the essential visual features of this period and address the current epistemological problems in art education to propose practical teaching strategies. In short, the aim is to show that historical aesthetics and contemporary creation are not in opposition but rather in harmony; through pedagogical integration, they can cultivate a new type of all-round artistic literacy that is both deep-rooted and forward-looking. At the foundation of this educational reform is a wish to protect the diversity of humanity in an age of uniformity. When local artistic traditions are not included in the official school curriculum, they gradually disappear from the collective memory of the people and are thus lost forever. At the same time, when the classroom is transformed into a space for active inheritance of national culture, it also spreads excellent traditional culture. The Sui and Tang Dynasties had an exceptionally open attitude towards the outside world, and therefore, native arts flourished not by being separate but by boldly incorporating foreign styles. Modern art education should aim to inherit the confidence of this period and help students establish their creative identity in their rich cultural heritage while being able to explore the possibilities presented by a modern, globalised society. Thus, to prevent the loss of culture, its local artistic forms will continue to be passed down and developed over time.

2. Aesthetic Characteristics of Sui and Tang Buddhist Intangible Heritage

Teachers need to know the general aesthetics of historical materials well enough to incorporate them into teaching activities for new generations. The art of the Sui and Tang dynasties is widely acclaimed for its large-scale combination of many cultures, and it has produced an all-encompassing visual system that combines the mystical and the mundane.

The above construction is also shown in the development of linear expression. Historically, the first emphasis of Chinese painting was on the line for expression and form [1]. At that time, there were many forms of Buddhist gods and immortals in Chinese art. Legendary 'iron-wire' lines and 'orchid-leaf' brushstrokes were used to create cascading drapery that appeared to be carried by a divine wind, and it is well-known that this resembles "clothes arising from water"; these rhythmic lines set the stage for colours and have an inherent aesthetic force of motion and psychology.

The other is the rich-in-colour philosophy of the intangible cultural heritage of this period. The magnificent murals in the cave temples along the Silk Road show that people knew a lot about mineral pigments [2]. Artisans carefully extracted, purified and used natural minerals such as azurite, malachite, cinnabar and lead white. These natural pigments do not have the same synthetic paint structure nowadays and are able to emit light in a different way for a long time. The use of these colours was greatly influenced by shading techniques from Central Asia and India, but it was adapted to fit into the tradition of flat colours in China; thus, colourful and intricate works have survived oxidation and damage from the environment over the past several hundred years.

Sculptural aesthetics in the Sui and Tang Dynasties have also provided rich models for space and monumentality. Integration of Buddhist iconography in large-scale stone steles and grottoes required artisans to solve difficult problems of three-dimensional representation and symbolic narrative [5]. Visual culture in the Middle Ages was often spatially elaborate, and many were presented as "transformative tableaux" to convey the complexity of Buddhist teachings visually [6]. The sculptures of this period have changed from the tall, thin and plain style of the previous time to a strong, large and robust plumpness that reflects the great material abundance and cultural confidence of the Tang Dynasty [8]. The reason for its mild character is that it has a small size and a subdued style. By breaking down these specific attributes, such as the kinetic line, luminous mineral colour palettes and sublime spatial proportions, contemporary art teachers can identify high-impact, readily observable elements for teaching in the classroom. In terms of the environment and building, one must remember that Sui and Tang Buddhist art was never to be displayed in isolation within a modern, bright-lighted museum space. The design of the murals and sculptures should be in harmony with the environment and light conditions of the underground cave temples. The large, peaceful faces of the sculpted gods appeared to be under the merciful light of the oil lamps, and the flickering light made them look strange. Many of the narrative murals were placed around the audience to provide them with abundant materials and create a large-scale sensory-stimuli space that dissolved the division between matter and spirit. Therefore, this all-encompassing method of space design can be considered a type of historical installation art. Contemporary educators need to understand this sense of immersion and environmental logic; it has been shown that, to some extent, classical aesthetic experience was also based on altering the psychological environment of viewing, rather than merely technical application of paint and plaster.

3. The Paradigm Shift Required in Modern Art Education

The inclusion of these classical aesthetic features demands

a new mode of teaching for modern art at the basic education level. Most of the world's art education systems today are overly standardised and focus too much on skills inherited from the European Renaissance and the subsequent modern periods. Although good for teaching technical skills, this method may be too limited in promoting the all-round development of students. Artistic creation is not limited to the production of copies of visual stimuli by means of machines; it is also a way of thinking that changes people's views and understanding of life [3]. When students are only trained in Western single-point perspective and *chiaroscuro*, their cognitive framework is inadvertently restricted, and they are unable to understand space, time, and narrative from other, non-Western perspectives.

To overcome this deficiency, art education should adopt an all-encompassing teaching model of visual culture and view historical relics as dynamic, socially embedded visual phenomena rather than static objects [4]. Thus, educators need to break down the traditional hierarchy distinguishing 'fine art' from 'craft'. The intangible cultural heritage of the Sui and Tang dynasties, such as the preparation of organic glue, mineral grinding and the cooperative work on large-scale murals, was once classified as artisanal labour rather than high academic art. By adding the actual processes of traditional craftsmanship to the modern studio, teachers can enhance the prestige of traditional craftsmanship and demonstrate to students that technical materiality and profound conceptual expression are not separate but interconnected.

The inclusion of historical inheritance in schooling also serves other social purposes. Heritage is not an innate and fixed feature of objects, but rather a dynamic, current process of culture-making [7]. Through engagement with the aesthetics of their ancestors, students are actively reconstructing their own sense of cultural identity. This will help to build a strong civil society, and art education will be used to help students adapt to the changes in society and participate actively in cultural inheritance and global citizenship [9]. By changing the direction of teaching from autonomous, individualized self-expression to collaborative interaction with the traditions of historical visual culture, new art classes can foster a generation of versatile artists who are also well-grounded in Chinese culture. In addition, the psychological consequences of an excessively uniform, Eurocentric curriculum are also to be expected. When students are subtly led to think that their own ancestral aesthetic traditions are merely for show, primitive or inferior to Western scientific realism, a deep sense of cultural alienation will often occur. Alienation reduces a student's intrinsic motivation for creation, and they are compelled to use foreign languages for expression, thus distancing themselves from their own culture. Radically reform the curriculum to elevate the academic rigor of Sui and Tang aesthetics to the same level as Renaissance perspective, and thus actively dismantle the long-standing hierarchy. Breakaway will allow students to be free from the constraints of the school. They can explore the non-linear, multi-perspective spatial concepts of traditional scroll painting more freely to find new ways of presenting the complexities of modern psychology and society. Finally, pedagogical equity will help foster a generation of young artists who are both self-assured and unafraid of challenging ideas.

4. Strategic Application in the Contemporary Art Classroom

Based on the above theoretical analysis, some new and modified teaching methods have been proposed for practice. The first two ways are to learn by experience and materials. Traditionally, art history has only memorised and passively observed the Sui and Tang periods' aesthetic features in textbooks or slides. Modern pedagogy should not be passive; it needs to reintroduce the sense of touch and physical experience for intangible cultural heritage. Design studio modules that allow students to recreate the historical material conditions actively. Students will be able to experience the properties of mineral ores firsthand, and by mixing some traditional animal glue with them and applying it to a prepared plaster board, they can feel that it is resistant and shiny after drying. This hands-on process can help us understand the old methods better and connect with them in a tangible way as new students.

Secondly, analyse and reinterpret the classical linear composition. Instead of having students copy superficially, educators can lead them to study the structure and mechanism of Tang Dynasty line work. Students can choose a certain motif, such as the swirling ribbons of celestial figures, and learn how to create an illusion of three dimensions and movement using various brushstrokes without shading. Learn the structure and then be able to use it in daily teaching. Students should be motivated to apply the newly learned linear vocabulary in their studies of modern subjects and create works such as rhythmic 'iron-wire' urban scenes or new portraits. Thus, history will be used actively and flexibly as an instrument rather than being a fixed historical trope.

Finally, the new application of these classical aesthetics can also be achieved through digital technology. Many digital preservation projects for well-known cultural and historical places have created large-scale, high-resolution visual databases [10]. Art educators can build virtual galleries based on these digital archives. Students of multimedia and graphic design can take the classical colour palettes and geometric patterns from the database to create new, avant-garde digital works through algorithmic tools. Animation and Virtual Reality students can also create immersive and interactive environments based on the spatial logic of ancient transformation tableaux. By combining the ancient aesthetic ideas of the Sui and Tang dynasties with new digital tools, a dynamic laboratory for promoting the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage in the art classroom for the future of visual communication has been created. In light of the above, the methods of assessment will also need to be changed fundamentally to match the new types of learning outcomes. The old grades only praise hyper-realistic proportions and photorealistic rendering, so they do not align with the aesthetic goals of Sui and Tang art. Therefore, teachers need to create advanced formative assessment systems that determine whether students have grasped the linear flow of rhythm, understood the concepts of harmony in mineral colours, and been able to creatively combine historical elements with modern themes. Organise a peer-critique session to discuss in detail, at an abstract level, how to carry out intangible cultural heritage in contemporary society. Additionally, a cooperative project-based evaluation system can be established to create a large-scale community

mural using traditional techniques and thus emulate the group-guild production mode of the old days. It will help them improve their technical skills and learn to work well with others; thus, the spirit of group creation in art will continue to thrive and be passed down in today's school.

5. Conclusion

Sui and Tang Buddhist intangible cultural heritage aesthetic elements can be applied in a very practical and deep manner to modern art education. As shown in this paper, the aesthetic achievements of this period - fine-grained linear rhythms, delicate mineral-colour palettes and large-scale spatial organisation - have provided a wealth of relatively unused visual language for contemporary art. By going beyond the limitations of Western academic approaches, new curricula for art education around the world are being developed.

However, the good effects of these factors cannot be achieved through mere historical emulation. It is required to adopt a high-quality, experience-based method of teaching and have students directly encounter the real situations of the intangible cultural heritage, analyze classical works in detail, and courageously combine these old skills with new and digital technologies. By taking part in the above activities, students will learn more about the past and experience the charm of historical culture themselves.

Finally, the new educational mode needs to meet some cultural demands. It makes the art class a lively space for the inheritance and development of intangible cultural heritage. Equip the new generation of artists with the rich aesthetic wisdom of the Sui and Tang Dynasties so that this magnificent historical legacy can continue to be carried forward, developed and inspire completely new directions for contemporary global art.

References

- [1] Sullivan, M. (1999). *The arts of China* (4th ed.). University of California Press.
- [2] Whitfield, R., Whitfield, S., & Agnew, N. (2000). *Cave temples of Mogao at Dunhuang: Art and history on the Silk Road*. Getty Publications.
- [3] Eisner, E. W. (2002). *The arts and the creation of mind*. Yale University Press.
- [4] Freedman, K. (2003). *Teaching visual culture: Curriculum, aesthetics, and the social life of art*. Teachers College Press.
- [5] Wong, D. C. (2004). *Chinese steles: Pre-Buddhist and Buddhist use of a symbolic form*. University of Hawai'i Press.
- [6] Wang, E. Y. (2005). *Shaping the Lotus Sutra: Buddhist visual culture in medieval China*. University of Washington Press.
- [7] Smith, L. (2006). *Uses of heritage*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203602263>
- [8] Howard, A. F., Li, S., Wu, H., & Yang, H. (2006). *Chinese sculpture*. Yale University Press.
- [9] Delacruz, E. M. (2009). Art education aims in the age of new media: Moving toward global civil society. *Art Education*, 62(5), 13-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043125.2009.11519032>
- [10] Agnew, N., Reed, M., & Ball, T. (Eds.). (2016). *Cave temples of Dunhuang: Buddhist art on China's Silk Road*. Getty Conservation Institute.