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## Comparative study on the Media and Techniques of Ink Painting and Oil Painting

**Zhao Jiewen, Fareez Vincent Amos@Mohd Fadly\***

\* Corresponding Author

Department Of Art And Design, Faculty Of Art, Sustainability And Creative Industry,  
Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Tanjung Malim, Perak, Malaysia

zhaojiewen1128@126.com, fareez.vincent@fskik.upsi.edu.my  
Tel: +86 15135902135

### Abstract

Artists have long favored oil and ink due to their unique technical languages, creating distinct visual effects in traditional painting. Since the mid-20th century, art movements have challenged traditional concepts and expanded artistic boundaries, enabling diverse media use. This qualitative study focuses on contemporary Chinese art, analyzing the historical and technological evolution of ink and oil painting through literature and case studies. This study aims to compare these media in classic and modern works, assisting artists in selecting appropriate media, inspiring innovative blends, and ultimately benefiting art research.

Keywords: Ink Painting, Oil Painting, Media, Technique

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### 1.0 Introduction

In traditional Chinese art, ink is considered the most emblematic medium. It symbolizes harmony, spontaneity, and a close bond with nature, with its fluidity mirroring the interaction between the artist's brushstrokes and the medium. In contrast, Western painting emphasizes colour, light, and shadow, which lends a greater sense of realism to the art.

Contemporary artwork is informed by tradition, with artists employing diverse materials to advance innovative practices across cultural contexts. The differences in media are of great consequence in the presentation of the work, and these media allow modern artists to blend tradition and innovation. In 1979, Kong Baji, one of the artists featured in the 'Shanghai Twelve Artists Exhibition', traveled to Dunhuang for sketching and creation, attempting to paint oil paintings on rice paper ( Cui, 2022 ). Contemporary oil and ink painters such as Xu Bing challenge form and texture ( Lee, 2011; Kapoor, 2019 ) in his work 'New English Calligraphy', The work presents a middle ground between East and West, where the clash of cultures and representations of fonts prompts an exploration of the 'fusion' of cultural symbols and suggests a new perspective on the reorganisation of the inherent order of artistic elements.

At present, there are still specific research gaps in related studies:

- a. The systematic research on media convergence methods is insufficient.
- b. The theoretical support in cross-cultural practice is weak.

This study employs aesthetic morphology as a research framework, providing valuable clues for exploring the visual language of art in Chinese and Western media. The objective is to provide creators with alternative perspectives on the relationship between local art

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and their own artistic language in the present era. This, in turn, enables them to select the most appropriate media, artistic symbols, and structural elements for their works.

## 2.0 Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology and is based on a case study. Lu ( 2023 ) discussed the time boundary of contemporary Chinese painting in the study. Since 2000, there has been continuous attention and research of Chinese contemporary art in the world. The trend of mixed media has become an indispensable part of contemporary Chinese painting. Therefore, for the choice of artists, focus on Chinese contemporary artists who have been active in the painting world since 2000. An in-depth study combining relevant artistic practice with theoretical literature.

Part I: A comparison was made between ink and oil paintings' presentation, texture and artistic language. Understanding of specific artistic presentations can facilitate the comprehension of the underlying aesthetic trends of different arts.

Part II: Based on the data collected, selected contemporary and modern artworks are evaluated through the lens of image analysis of the works and fieldwork. The artworks' forms, representations, textures, and modern techniques will be analyzed, compared, and contrasted. The commonalities and differences will be identified to differentiate between the characteristics of different media and how they are integrated.

## 3.0 Findings

This study examines the expressive and technical characteristics of diverse artwork mediums through Comparison and a comprehensive analysis of mediums and formal languages.

### 3.1 The Origin of Oil and Ink Painting

Ink painting has always emphasized the importance of "writing the spirit through form" and "writing the heart through technique". Since the Renaissance, Western painting has expressed the world from a central perspective and paid attention to the prominent objects in the scene ( Fan, 2023 ). As globalization progresses, analyzing the differences between these two media aids in comprehending the creative methodologies of the works, facilitates cross-media learning and exchange, and promotes the interaction and integration of diverse cultures, thereby broadening the horizons of contemporary art.

#### Oil Painting:

The history of oil painting is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, encompassing a vast array of cultural influences and artistic traditions over the course of several centuries.

During the period between the 15th and 16th centuries, with the advent of the Renaissance movement, oil painting became an important medium for expressing humanist ideas and displaying realist styles. Artists such as Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo of Italy, and Jan van Eyck of the Netherlands contributed to the advancement of the art of oil painting. The 17th century saw the advent of a golden age of oil painting in Europe. Artists of this period employed their superb oil painting techniques to capture the moments of daily life. These contributions elevated the art of oil painting to an unparalleled level of sophistication and expression. The advent of the 19th century saw the emergence of Impressionism, which marked a further revolutionary phase in the history of oil painting. Subsequently, a series of modern art movements emerged, including Post-Impressionism, Fauvism, and Cubism. From the beginning of the 20th century to the present day, the art of oil painting has continued to evolve globally. The advent of such movements as Abstract Expressionism, Surrealism, and Pop Art has rendered oil painting an efficacious instrument for articulating personal sentiments, social critique, and cultural heterogeneity. Concurrently, the acceleration of globalisation has resulted in the emergence of new forms of oil painting created by artists from diverse cultural backgrounds, reflecting a process of mutual influence and a diversification of the art of oil painting.

#### The development of oil painting in China:

Oil painting emerged in China during the late Ming Dynasty and gained popularity by the late 19th century. The year 1979 marks a new historical era for Chinese oil painting, as it embarked on a path of unprecedented vitality and prosperity, with the most significant degree of freedom in oil painting creation, unveiling the prelude to individualized artistic creation ( Shi, 2019 ). This reflects artists' focus on local issues and culture, accompanied by increased international exchanges and collaborations in China's oil painting industry. In the context of contemporary Chinese art, there has been an increasing intersection between oil painting and ink painting.

#### Ink Painting:

Ink painting is a kind of Chinese painting, whose origin and development have a long history, full of rich cultural connotation and artistic charm. Its origin and development are a process full of exploration, innovation, and integration.

#### Early germination:

According to historical records, the earliest ink painting in China arose in the period of the Eastern Jin Dynasty. During this period, ink painting had begun to make its mark in painting, and although the technique was not yet mature, it had already demonstrated its unique artistic potential.

#### Period of development:

Ink painting developed significantly during the Tang Dynasty. The Song Dynasty represents the apogee of the development of ink painting. In addition to focusing on the use of brush and ink, painters began to devote greater attention to the creation of mood. The contributions of Li Cheng, Fan Kuan, Dong Yuan, and Ju Ran elevated the art of ink painting to a new level of excellence, reflecting the aesthetic sensibilities of traditional Chinese culture in a profound manner. During the Yuan Dynasty, the combination of literati painting and ink painting resulted in the formation of a distinctive artistic style. During the Ming and Qing dynasties and beyond, the influence of Western culture led to further developments and innovations in ink painting.

In today's Chinese ink art, conceptual ink art not only realizes the contemporary transformation of ancient ink art by learning Western conceptualized artistic thought and language, but also transcends the boundaries of traditional ink painting, reconstructs the essence of ink art, and shows the artist's free and independent innovative spirit ( Wang, 2019 ). With its unique artistic charm and cultural connotation, it has become one of the important treasures of Chinese culture.

### *3.2 Comparison of Oil and Ink Paintings in terms of Media and Techniques*

The chemical intricacy of oil paint changes texture and layer, whereas ink drawing is spontaneous and flowing (Hui, 2009; Johnson, 2014). Below is a detailed comparison of the characteristics of ink painting and oil painting, specifically focusing on media and techniques.

#### *3.2.1 A comparison of the most commonly used media in oil and ink painting*

##### *Oil Painting:*

A variety of mediums are commonly used in oil painting, and these mediums play a vital role in the creation process of oil painting. Since 1940, the emergence of new materials has significantly increased the number of pigments available to artists, expanding from a limited selection of traditional, primarily inorganic pigments to hundreds of new synthetic varieties. This shift has had a profound impact on the appearance of many oil paintings produced in the twentieth century ( Van Loon, 2020 ).

Commonly used oils in oil painting include linseed oil, walnut oil, and quick-drying linseed oil, each serving distinct purposes based on their drying times and properties. Linseed oil is the primary medium, known for forming a strong film but prone to yellowing, while walnut oil dries more slowly, making it suitable for maturing effects. Additionally, thinning solvents like turpentine and odorless thinners play a crucial role in oil painting, facilitating paint dilution and brush cleaning while promoting faster drying times.

Once the oil painting is complete, the choice of varnish protectant is of great consequence in determining the final effect of the piece. Additionally, the artist may select other auxiliary media, such as white medium, varnish, molding paste, and so forth, in accordance with the requirements of the intended presentation. These oil painting mediums can be selected and combined according to personal preference and painting style to achieve the desired effect and texture.

##### *Ink Painting:*

The primary media employed in ink painting are water and ink, which are combined to create a unique substance. This distinctive language of ink colour endows ink painting with the artistic characteristics of simplicity, ethereality, and profound meaning.

The traditional media most commonly employed in the practice of ink painting include: brushes, ink blocks, paper, and ink stone. Brushes constitute the principal implement employed in the practice of ink painting. The artist's control over brush strength and angle allows for varied line qualities, which are essential for expressing form and texture in ink painting. Xuan paper is a traditional Chinese handmade paper that exhibits distinctive properties, namely strong ink absorption and resilience against deformation. Silk is a distinctive material employed in the practice of ink painting; the celebrated 'Thousand Miles of Rivers and Mountains' is created using silk. The regularity of silk and the characteristics of the alum system used in its production mean that it can be repeatedly rendered, making it ideal for painting fine and complex works. The ink stone is a tool employed for the grinding of the ink block, typically utilised in conjunction with an ink block.

New Media Materials: Yang (2021) said in his article Imageization and Abstraction of Contemporary Chinese Oil Painting that every artist attaches great importance to the choice of professional tools and treats it with a higher sense of responsibility. With the advent of new technologies and materials, contemporary ink painting artists have begun incorporating a diverse range of novel media into their creations. The introduction of these materials not only broadens the creative field and expressive methods of ink painting but also infuses new vitality and creativity into it, enriching the artistic language and expressive forms of ink painting. These media play an indispensable role in the creation of ink painting, and together they constitute the unique artistic language and expression of ink painting.

#### *3.2.2 Comparison of techniques between oil and ink painting*

##### *Oil Painting:*

Oil painting is a long-standing form of painting, with different styles in each period. The basic techniques of oil painting include direct colouring and transparent painting.

The direct colouring method, also known as the opaque colouring method, is a method in which, by virtue of the colour feeling of the object or the conception of the picture, colour is laid down on the canvas at one time. The colour pigments used in the direct colouring method are thicker and more saturated, and the brushstrokes are clearer, making it easier to express the vivid feelings when painting.

Transparent painting is mainly for colour overdyeing, which is a traditional painting technique in Europe before the 19th century, and is the oldest known painting technique for easel painting. By overdrawing the colours in layers, two colours are visually blended to create a third colour. This painting method can make the underlying colours of the work vaguely visible, producing subtle colour changes and jewel-like luster, suitable for the expression of the texture and solidity of the object, and exceptionally able to depict the delicate colour changes of the skin of the figure.

**Specific Techniques - Strokes:** Line, a line drawn with a brush. The use of various kinds of lines, such as slim, bold, neat or random, as well as repeated interlacing and overlapping, makes the language of oil painting richer. Paint is the main method of composing the surface of an oil painting. The methods of painting are flat, thick, and thin. In addition to the two essential oil painting techniques, artists usually combine their personal painting habits with the purpose of the painting and use some other exceptional brushstrokes to enhance the expressive power of the picture. These techniques are combined with each other and used flexibly, which makes the oil painting works present rich and diverse visual effects and artistic charm.

#### *Ink Painting:*

As an important form of traditional Chinese painting, from shaping to colouring, ink painting techniques include hooking, chapping, rubbing, dotting, and dyeing. Each of which has rich and varied changes, which not only reflect the artist's mastery of ink and brushwork, but also show the unique artistic charm of ink painting.

**Basic Techniques:** Hook, use the brush to hook the line on paper or silk, that is, use the line to express the decent outline form of the object being drawn. The strength of the hook line changes according to the distance and weight of the object, in order to show the sense of space and momentum, and to enhance the distinctiveness of the form. Chapped: Chapped techniques emphasize variations in ink intensity to convey light, shadow and hierarchy. Rubbing : Using different forms of points, point out the abstract feelings of the objects attached to the object. In order to show or smooth or rough texture, rubbing method also need to pay attention to changes in the weight of the brush. Dots: Used to express the details of moss on rocks or flowers and fruits on trees. Dyeing: On the basis of modelling, using different light inks, applying techniques such as overdyeing, spot-dyeing, overdyeing and catch-dyeing, the large brush strokes overdye the black and white, light and dark colour characteristics of the object.

**Ink Techniques:** Ink painting uses ink as the main raw material, and pays attention to 'vividness', not confined to the resemblance of the appearance of the object, but more emphasis on the expression of the author's subjective interests. The use of ink colours also has different instructions. Thick, light, splash, accumulation, broken, is the 'five colours of ink'(Huang,2019). The thick ink method uses thicker ink with less water to emphasize outlines and details, creating a deep, stable impression. In contrast, the light ink method incorporates more water for a delicate effect, often used for depicting serene natural scenes, while techniques like splashing ink, ink accumulation, and broken ink enhance the vibrancy and dimensionality of the artwork through dynamic interactions of colour and texture.

People must continue to innovate in the traditional brushwork and concept of Chinese painting in the process of inheritance, integrate the spirit of the times, and enrich the language of painting (Zhu, 2020) . These common techniques cover a wide range of basic techniques, ink techniques, and other techniques. Artists combine them with each other and use them flexibly, which makes ink painting works present a unique flavour and depth.

## **4.0 Discussion and Implications: Explore the Relationship between the Two in Chinese Contemporary Art**

In the context of contemporary Chinese art, the mutual influence of oil painting and ink painting has emerged as a distinctive form of artistic expression. This fusion reflects the artists' profound understanding and innovative exploration of traditional and modern, oriental and Western art, as well as demonstrating the infinite possibilities and charms of painting.

### *4.1 Stage of Fusion Attempt*

Although the trend of mutual influence is not immediately evident, over time, some Chinese artists have begun to experiment with the integration of oil painting techniques and elements of ink painting. While these efforts may initially appear fragmented and unsystematic, they lay the groundwork for deeper interactions between the two media.

Wu Guanzhong's oeuvre exemplifies the synthesis of traditional Chinese art and Western painting techniques. The series of paintings entitled 'The People of Jiangnan' provides an illustrative example of Wu Guanzhong's ability to convey the serenity and beauty of the water towns of Jiangnan through the use of simple brushstrokes. The artist employs a combination of oil painting and ink painting techniques, whereby the black pigment is allowed to pass through the brush, resulting in a gradation of ink colour and the expression of the intricate texture and layering of the subject matter. The integration of oil painting and ink produces a visual depiction that showcases oil painting's chromatic richness and three-dimensionality, while evoking the atmospheric allure of ink painting.

There were also numerous artists contemporary to Wu Guanzhong who shared similar traits. Their works exhibit an interplay between Western and Chinese painting elements, reflecting the innovative exploration of oil painting and ink painting by artists of that era.

### *4.2 The Stage of Diversified Fusion of Contemporary Art*

In the context of Chinese contemporary art, the mutual influence of oil painting and ink painting in artistic creation is increasingly exhibiting a trend of greater diversity. For example, the works of artist Ying Jingjing: the Ink and Wash and Ink-Crystal-Jing series, demonstrate a subtle blending of elements from both Eastern and Western cultures. These works draw inspiration from nature and express perceptions and reflections on life and nature through unique artistic techniques. This cross-cultural fusion imbues her works with a richer connotation and a broader space for interpretation.

Another example is the video work 'New Shanhajing' by artist Qiu Xianxiong, which is a creative integration of traditional and modern elements with profound social significance and artistic value(refer to Figure 1). This work is composed of numerous ink paintings, with its creative inspiration drawn from the ancient Chinese mythological classic Shan Hai Jing (Wang, 2019) . The painting medium

predominantly employed in these works is acrylic on canvas, while the presentation form of the pictures integrates the composition and mood of ink and wash, which is finally presented in the form of video.



Figure1: 'New Shanhajing'

Source: [<http://www.hiart.cn/news/detail/765hsvn.html>]

In conclusion, the interaction between oil painting and ink painting has emerged as a distinctive form of artistic expression within contemporary Chinese painting. These works demonstrate the artists' profound understanding and innovative exploration of traditional and modern, oriental and western art, as well as presenting us with a vibrant and multifaceted world of painting art.

## 5.0 Conclusion& Recommendations

The modes of interaction between oil painting and ink painting.

In contemporary art, fusion has emerged as a prevalent trend. This trend is not only evidenced by cross-border collaboration between disparate art forms, but is also reflected in the diversification of art-creation concepts, techniques, materials and even cultural contexts. However, the artists of today who combine oils and ink to create hybrid works are not often explored (Smith, 2018). This study provides an overview and summary of this aspect, highlighting several noteworthy approaches that emerge when examining the mutual influences of ink painting and oil painting in contemporary art. For further details, please refer to Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 Table of Media Convergence Approaches

Aspect	Description
1. Cross-media fusion	Contemporary art features cross-media fusion, with artists exploring diverse techniques and materials to create unprecedented forms.
2. The profound interaction between art and technology	Rapid technological development drives the integration of technology and art, providing new tools and platforms for artists.
3. The convergence of Eastern and Western cultures	Globalization fosters the blending of Eastern and Western cultures in contemporary art, promoting cultural diversity and inclusivity.

### 5.1 Cross-media fusion

A key characteristic of contemporary art is its cross-media nature. Artists are no longer constrained by the limitations of a single medium of artistic expression; instead, they challenge the boundaries of painting by actively exploring the combination of diverse techniques and materials to create unprecedented art forms.

### 5.2 The profound interaction between art and technology.

The rapid development of science and technology has also given rise to the trend of contemporary art integration, which is reflected in the close integration of technology and art. The advent of digital art, virtual reality, artificial intelligence and other nascent technologies has furnished artists with a plethora of hitherto unavailable tools and platforms for the creation of art.

### 5.3 The convergence of Eastern and Western cultures

In the context of globalization, the blending of Eastern and Western cultures has become a significant aspect of contemporary art integration. Artists draw inspiration from their cultural backgrounds, fostering a dialogue and interaction through their work. The interdisciplinary nature of art allows audiences from diverse backgrounds to better understand each other, thereby promoting cultural diversity and inclusivity.

The current trend of contemporary art integration places significant emphasis on the importance of innovation and practice. While artists continue to explore new art forms and expressions, they also focus on applying these innovations to actual artistic creations. This trend not only enriches the expression and connotation of art but also provides the audience with a broader and deeper space for artistic experience.

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## Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This study explores expressive and technical characteristics of diverse art media, offering creators alternative perspectives on local art and personal artistic language. By facilitating appropriate medium selection, it aims to enhance the research interests of artists, educators, and enthusiasts, positively impacting art.

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