

# **Artistic Methodologies Analysis of Chinese Comprehensive Material Painting**

**By**

**Yue Zhang**

Ph.D, Candidate, Arts Performance Communication, School of Liberal Arts, Shinawatra University

Email: [62405049-8@st.siu.ac.th](mailto:62405049-8@st.siu.ac.th)

**Jaipak Burapajana**

Assoc. Prof. Dr, School of Liberal Arts, Shinawatra University

Email: [jaipak.b@siu.ac.th](mailto:jaipak.b@siu.ac.th)

## **Abstract**

Comprehensive Material Painting is the product of the development of Chinese art modernity. Its artistic methodology has a relatively clear direction in terms of artistic concepts, philosophical logic, language forms, material techniques and creative methods. It is an artistic exploration of modernity, which is rooted in the spirit of Chinese culture and integrate others into the self.

**Keywords:** Chinese Comprehensive Material Painting, Modernity, Artistic Methodology.

## **1. Introduction**

In 2010, the China arts organization established the Chinese Comprehensive Material Painting and Restoration Art Committee, and proposed the nomenclature of Comprehensive Material Painting (CMP). According to the actual situation of the development of Chinese art, Hu Wei, chairman of the Art Committee, gave the following academic paraphrases of CMP: the evolution of single painting material techniques; mutual penetration and integration of multiple painting types or multiple material techniques; Original ecological expression and thematic creation (W. Hu, 2020).

Over the past decade, CMP has been active in Chinese art circles, one of the reasons is its artistic value. Wan (2017) pointed out that for Chinese contemporary art, it not only provides a new form of artistic language expression, but also reveals a new way of artistic thinking, a new perspective of viewing the world and a new method of expressing artistic ideas. W. Hu (2020) and T. Zhang (2021) both positioned CMP as the Cultural self-awareness of the development of Chinese art into the 21st century. Therefore, it can be considered that CMP should have special artistic methodological value in the field of Chinese contemporary art. However, at present, there is no special research to summarize in this direction.

*The research objective of this study is to sort out and analyze the art methodologies of CMP.*

## **2. Literature review.**

Although there is no special research to summarize in this direction at present, it is undeniable that scholars have made many valuable and meaningful discussions, which are summarized as follows:

### **2.1 Painting languages.**

Expanding the possibilities and cultural pluralism of the development of Chinese oil painting through the transformation and reorganization of the linguistic order of painting, that is, focusing on the study of the material ontology language, highlighting its independent aesthetic qualities, while developing traditional art by combining the individual language needs of artists (Y. Zhang, 2016; T. Zhang, 2013).

### **2.2 Materials and techniques.**

The expansion of materials and techniques is seen as an important means of inspiring contemporary forms of artistic expression. For instance, explore the relationship between Tempera painting and Chinese painting (Y. Zhan, 2007; 2016), and emphasize the openness and possibility of multiple interpretations of Tempera in the contemporary cultural context (Wan, 2016). As well as the recollection, reconceptualization and reuse of the many materials and techniques of ancient Chinese painting that have yet to be discovered, inherited and expanded (Kong, 2017; W. Hu, 2020; M. Hu, 2016).

### **2.3 Expression form:**

Comprehensive materials have brought new forms of expression to Chinese painting and created new aesthetic forms. For example, Cui (2022) summarized the new manifestations of Chinese CMP: natural material texture, innovative use of traditional materials, collage of ready-made products, comprehensive juxtaposition of multi type material techniques, etc. Kong (2017) positioned the original ecological expression proposed by Hu Wei as a re-grasp and re-creation of the visual aesthetic experience of China's "pre calligraphy and painting era".

### **2.4 Thingness and Spirituality:**

T. Zhang (2019) pointed out that CMP has evolved from the linguistic subjectivity of materials to the exploration of the meaning of Things eventually. That is to say, CMP not only emphasizes the important characteristics of material forms and properties themselves as the language of the subject involved in the structure of the picture, but also emphasizes the social and cultural semantics behind them, that is, Thingness. CMP emphasizes the "unity" of thingness and spirituality (T. zhang, 2013& 2019). Y. Zhang (2016) believes that artists do not need to discuss things and spirit from the perspective of philosophy, he narrowly understands the unity of the two as the "quality" of materials, that is, the materialization of spirit and the concepts and perspectives that artists need to have. In this regard, the researcher believe that this is a unique perspective of understanding, but the "unity" embodies the spirit of Chinese philosophy.

### **2.5 Themes:**

CMP emphasizes the theme, and W. Hu (2020) pointed out that on the one hand, it is to avoid CMP becoming a skill game; On the other hand, it is to clarify the unitary value of Chinese contemporary art in the world art system. So, where does the theme come from? W. Hu (2020) pointed out that it comes from classicality, includes: Chinese classicality, Western classicality, and classicality that contemporary people feel, understand and express creatively. Yu (2019) also mentioned the individual experience and life emotional experience of contemporary people. In addition, W. Hu (2020) emphasized CMP's innovation of thematic art creation mode formed since the founding of new China.

The prototype of artistic methodology of CMP can be glimpsed through the above reviewing of previous studies. Compared with above, this study will also pay attention to the following points: 1) Sorting out the language relationship of materials needs to pay attention to the context of the language relationship of Chinese painting, and clarify the relationship between images and materials; 2) The analysis of the modernity transformation scheme of the integration of China and the West from the perspective of materials and techniques; 3) The clarification of Chinese philosophy and aesthetic spirit behind the "unity" of things and spirit; 4) Discuss how to "unite" from the perspective of Creation Methodology; 5) How to run through the thematic analysis in the works.

## **3. Research method**

Literature research is the main method. Cases and artworks analysis will focus on the arguments and become auxiliary aspects. At the same time, in order to highlight the difference between CMP and other painting forms, comparative analysis is also used. The data collection of this study is multifaceted, including literature, field research, interviews, open observation, etc.

## **4. Research Results**

### ***4.1 Language relations: reconstruction of the relationship between material language, form and representation.***

CMP emphasizes the switch of painting language order relations with materials as the main body.

On the one hand, it is influenced by Western art. In the 20th century, western art experienced the transformation of Mixed Media art, the material language has evolved from the material carrier as the representation object to the subjective existence with independent aesthetic value. This switch of order relationship opened up a broad space for the development of artistic expression forms.

On the other hand, it is also the continuation of the self-awareness of Chinese art modernity. History shows that since the 16th century, Chinese art has developed the art of surpassing nature and getting rid of representation and pursuing form independence, and this

spiritual essence is closely related to the aesthetic modernity transformation of Chinese art since the 19th century.

But it is worth noting that the emphasis on the subjectivity of material language does not mean that CMP will inevitably move towards abstraction. In the interview, scholar B said: "CMP belongs to postmodern, which means that it does not exclude realistic art" (from the researcher's interview data). That is, CMP can preserve the image, but rebuild the relationship between material and reproduction. Mr. Wu (2020), a famous art historian and professor of the University of Chicago in the United States, proposed the concept of Material Art. Although it is not exactly equivalent to CMP, his positioning of a form of Material Art provides a very useful path and annotation reference for this paper's interpretation of CMP. He pointed out that the practitioners of material art refused to regard materials as passive or neutral image carriers, but tried to directly contact materials and appropriately integrate materials in the physical sense with artistic expression. Although the characterization function of images was retained, they did not completely absorb materials and did not make them invisible.

In other words, for CMP, materials are not only the media of images, but also have independent aesthetic value as part of the information that artists intend to convey. At the same time, the emphasis on the subjectivity of material language does not mean neglecting the aesthetic underlying the formal language of paintings. After all, the combination of material and form can make the material language present in a powerful way. In fact, the relationship between materials, images and forms also answers the relationship between materials and themes in thematic creation of CMP's morphological interpretation.

Throughout the development of painting language, no matter Chinese painting or western painting, the order of painting language always evolves and transforms along with the spirit of the times, which is the fundamental driving force for the creation of CMP. Whether CMP can produce excellent art works depends on whether the artist can control the transformation of painting language order.

#### ***4.2 Materials and techniques: looking for the modern transformation path from material and technical languages.***

Contemporary China advocates the Autonomous Internationalisation of art under the cultural strategy of re-globalization, that is, the organic dialogue and integration between Chinese contemporary art and international art. CMP adheres to this spirit and provides an effective solution for the transformation of modernity in Chinese contemporary art by using material techniques and expressions as the entry point. This is because, firstly, materials can connect tradition and modern, nation and the world, east and west (Wu, 2020); secondly, the technical system is easier to be decomposed into independent elements into contemporary art practice than the image system and concept system; and thirdly, materials and technology are closely linked. The exploration can be roughly summed up in two directions.

**4.2.1 From West to East.** From West to East is to learn from Western Classics (ancient and modern), and then return to the Oriental aesthetic cultural context, so as to further expand the multiple expressions of Chinese contemporary art language. According to the literature *Res Militaris*, vol.12, n°3, November issue 2022

review, Mr. Zhang Yuan has provided an important scheme from the perspective of artistic methods on this path, and it has been proved by his teaching achievements and the practice of many artists for many years that the scheme is effective and has made great contributions.

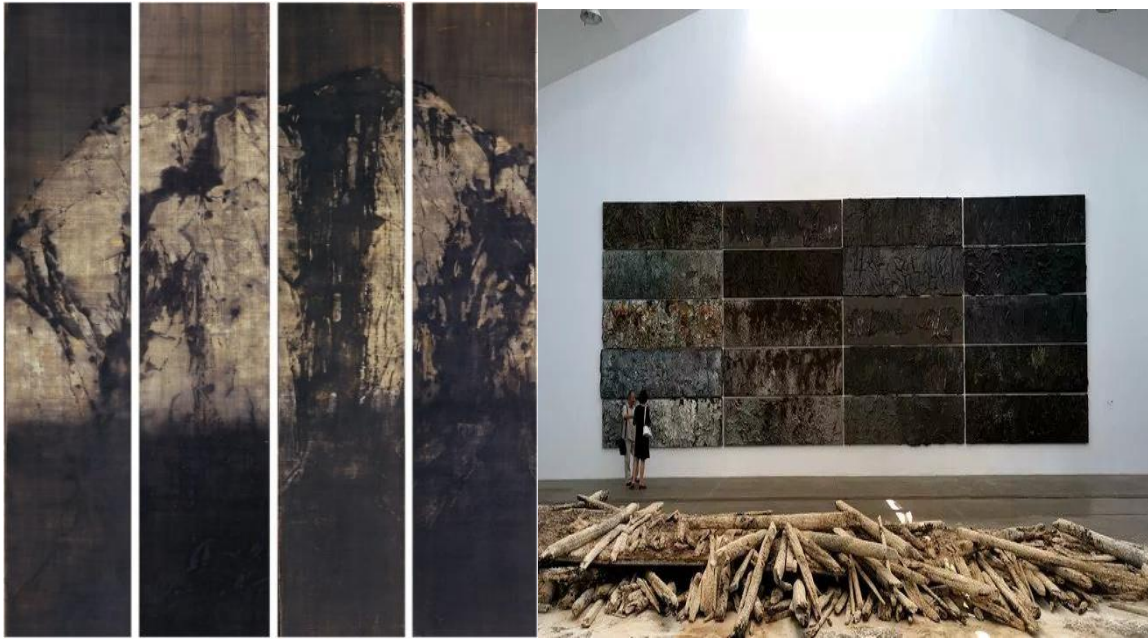
Scheme analysis: Y. Zhang (2016) believes that Tempera, a painting language expression form eliminated by oil painting in the west, has the artistic potential for contemporary transformation and can inspire and expand new spaces of CMP expression in China. Such as: the planarity and abstraction of easy expression interconnected with Modern Art; the hydrophilicity of the media interoperates with Chinese painting methods; the uniqueness of quality brought by materiality connects with Chinese aesthetic culture; and the openness and possibility of multiple interpretations (combining, colliding, grafting and blending with other painting languages) resonate with the contemporary spirit of freedom and diversity of the times.

For instance, Cao Jigang's tempera landscape series, the abstract ink marks are either freely sprinkled, or hidden in the silky, rich and thin texture traces like jade, forming a beauty of both long vicissitudes and light freedom. This is the perfect integration of Chinese ink and wash modeling, rendering and Tempera's water-based characteristics and transparent layers; this is the materiality of jade or glaze that Tempera has been forgotten by painting after layers of superposition; this is the beauty of thingness under the fusion of East and West, tradition and modernity.

**4.2.2 From east to west.** From east to West means to integrate Chinese national culture and art into the context of contemporary art, and explore the possibility of contemporary transformation of Chinese native painting. After combing through the literature review, it is clear that Mr. Hu Wei, Mr. Kong Xinmiao and Mr. Hu Mingzhe have made important explorations or reflections in this direction.

Program analysis: to experience the ancient people's extreme pursuit of texture in the frescoes, stone carvings, porcelain, jade and bronze from the "pre-calligraphy-and-painting era" in China, to discover the forgotten material technique system, to regain the visual aesthetic strength of traces, and to bring them to "today" to explore the possibility of contemporary transformation of Chinese local painting (W. Hu, 2020; Kong, 2017). Such as: the classical language of "color surface modeling" and "superimposition of layers" formed by the media of colored rock particles in ancient Chinese frescoes has been marginalized for a long time since Chinese art entered the "painting and calligraphy era", but it has the potential to inspire contemporary ways of speaking about materials (M. Hu, 2016); and the "beauty of nature craftsmanship" that is integrated with frescoes, that is, the various traces that have "grown" as a result of the baptism of time. These accidental "status quo" and "growing classics" are expressed in contemporary art creation, which is the so-called original ecological expression in the interpretation of morphology (W. Hu, 2020).

For example, in Hu Wei's *Scrolled Book* series, the artist creatively melted the original materiality of Chinese rice paper and transformed it into a carrier of new imagery. The transformation of decay and magic is like reincarnation of life and death, rebirth of fire and nirvana, and the material texture adds a "sense of history". Hu Wei once said that this work is a concentration of his entire love for history and his feelings of being intoxicated in the ruins (Yu, 2019).



Left: **Figure 1:** *Cao Jigang. Huashan painting. Linen Tempera. 400x280 cm. 2007.*  
Source: Photograph by researcher.

Right: *Figure 2: Scrolled Book in Formless, Thingness- Hu Wei 's Works Exhibition.*  
Source: Photograph by researcher.

Of course, the " painting and calligraphy era " is also derivable, as evidenced by many works of art. For example: the experimental ink art that breaks the traditional Chinese painting patterns and methods to show the endless variations of water and ink, and the exploration of thingness for all kinds of unknown possibilities from the paper characteristics of rice paper materials.

In short, whether from West to East or from East to West, they all end up going the same way, towards the integration of East and West, Tradition and Modernity, with an emphasis on inheritance and expansion at the same time.

#### ***4.3 Philosophical logic: emphasizing the harmony between thingness and spirituality in accordance with the Chinese philosophy of the unity of subject and object.***

Heidegger believes that the thingness of an artwork encompasses both the material as a pure thing and the meaning hidden behind the thing (Heidegger, 2018). CMP emphasizes this thingness, that is, in addition to paying attention to the material properties and aesthetic value of the materials which as the main language involved in the structure of the picture, the artist must also grasp and use the cultural connotation of the various materials, while combining them with the spirit given by the painter. Behind this idea is the spirit of Chinese philosophy and aesthetics.

**4.3.1 The traditional Chinese philosophical spirit of "和"(harmony) is emphasized.** It is different from the separation of subject and object in Western modernity philosophy, and the praise of man's conquest of nature and society. The spirit of Chinese traditional culture emphasizes the spirit of "harmony" of subject and object. Taoist philosophy teaches harmony

between man and nature; Confucian ethics teaches harmony between man and man (Social Harmony); Buddhist philosophy teaches harmony between man and oneself (S. zhang, 2016).

This "harmony" is one of the fundamental spirits of ancient Chinese wisdom. In terms of the character of the culture itself, it can be said to be sustainable development, harmony in diversity, and applicable to the world; as far as the relationship between culture and nature, it can be described as the unity of man and nature, the exploration of the origin, and the inclusion of dialectic.

**4.3.2 The realm of “物化” (Materialization) and “物忘” (Things forgetting) in oriental aesthetics.** The so-called Materialization and Thing forgetting can both be understood as a kind of the realm of Oriental aesthetics, in which things and self are the subject of each other, and differences and oppositions among all things are eliminated, and nature is left to its own devices. “不知有我，即不知有物，而遂物相忘” (I don't know the existence of myself; that is, I don't know the existence of things; so I and things forget each other) (Xu, 2020, P.115).

In the creation of CMP, the above philosophical and aesthetic realm is the unity of thingness and spirituality.

#### ***4.4 The creation method: emphasizing Human Poetic Interventions.***

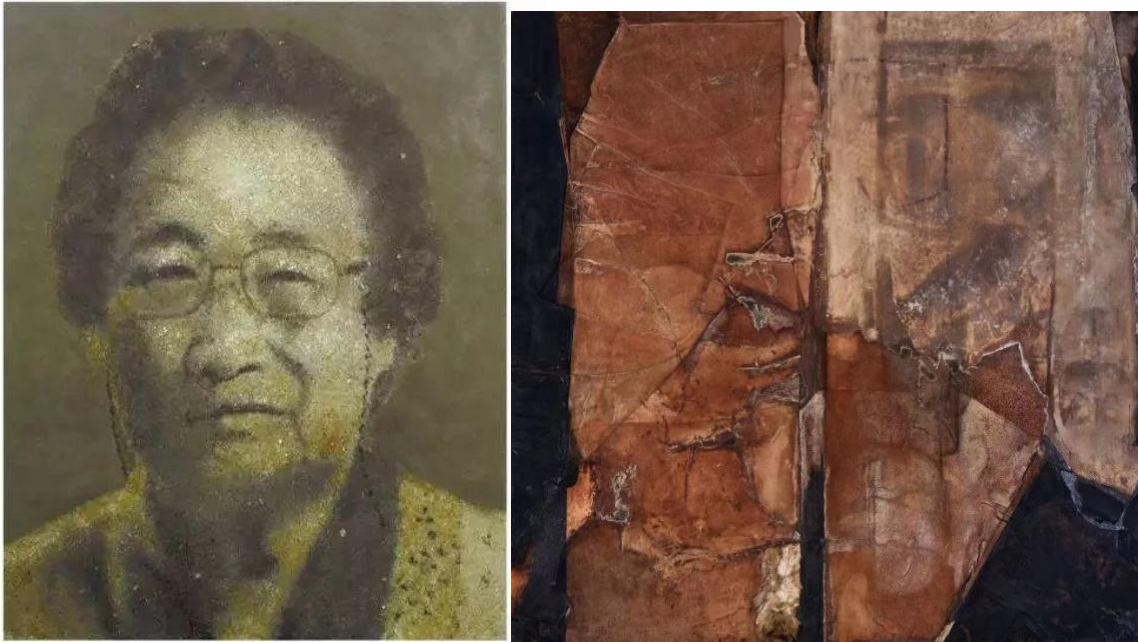
Specifically, in the creation of CMP, it respects the presentation of nature, which described by the researcher as the "poetic" intervention of man. Poetic, in Heidegger's definition, means to create. This creation means that one is in a suitable state to face the world around him, and the world will blossom into a meaning to him (T. Zhang, 2019). Guo Xiang described such artists' intervention realm of “适可而止”(knowing when to stop) as “乃相合而无相合之迹”(consistent without any trace of consistency)(as cited in Xu, 2020, p.116). In the creation of CMP, how to embody the poetic intervention of people?

**4.4.1 The "unity" of the artist's thought and material spirit.** This "unity" mainly reflects that the selection of artistic materials needs to meet two prerequisites: first, the individual visual language of the material blends with the theme of the work; Second, the cultural resources of materials and the theme spirit form an interaction and intercommunication.

The process of selection requires artists not only to repeatedly comb, summarize and re-understand the language attributes of different material materials, but also to explore the profound cultural connotation behind the materials. By borrowing and transforming them, the interaction and intercommunication between the theme and the spirit of the materials are realized.

For example, in Wu Qingyang's *People Weekly - Tu Youyou*, it is well known that Tu youyou's compound medicine based on artemisinin has saved the lives of millions of malaria patients around the world. The artist painted Tu youyou's portrait with Artemisia powder and Chinese medicine residue, which can't be carried by other materials. Batu's sound of antiquity is made of raw cow leather. By cutting, coloring, polishing and other means, it not only makes the material beauty of the material itself overflow, but also seems to hear the sound from a

distance on the vast grassland.



Left: **Figure 3:** Wu Qingyang. *People Weekly: Tu Youyou. Comprehensive Material Painting* 220x180cm. Source: Photograph by researcher.

Right: *Figure4:* Batu, *Voice of Ancient Times. Comprehensive Material Painting* .179 ×199cm. Source: Photograph by researcher.

#### **4.4.2 The unity of Paintality and Things.**

In the creation of CMP, the unity of Paintality and Things is reflected in the natural harmony of the two, rather than blindly pursuing the renewal and application of materials, the implementation of complex techniques and the texture representation of the picture. In other words, neither the superficiality of materials and techniques should be allowed to obscure the thingness, nor should the thingness be allowed to exist apart from the painting. This process not only has high requirements for the artist's artistic accomplishment, but also requires the artist to constantly experience and practice in a reciprocally entangled relationship between technology and nature. Here, the researcher summarizes two common approaches in the creation of CMP.

##### **4.4.2.1 Natural generation.**

In the creation of CMP, natural generation is a technical means and aesthetic intention to indirectly obtain a certain effect compared with the direct painting method in painting, and it refers to a kind of accidental state that the material naturally presents after "the work of natural". The attitude of natural generation is that people should enter the generation of things, experience things, feel things and listen to things. Entering the creation of things is entering the creation of the world.

For example, huqinwu's *pulp series*. He reverted the rice paper as the carrier of painting and writing to the pulp itself as a pure thing, and then put it into the natural environment, where soil, air, temperature and so on are the main creators, and the unexpectedly rich effect of the final work is time itself. Artists occasionally carve these "paper piers" like carving rocks, and



will select and deal with these final effects, and take them to the exhibition hall to continue generating new landscapes. In the whole process, the artist always maintained the poetic intervention of things and the awe of nature.

#### ***4.4.2.2 Integrate the relationship between material and picture.***

The materials fit the theme, the color relationship, the structure of the picture and the spirituality of the work without any traces.

For example, artist wanghuaiqing integrated wood materials with furniture or calligraphy strokes of traditional wood structures in the way of western structuralism and deconstructionism. From those hard and twisted wood, from those interlocking mortise and tenon structures, and from the scattered strokes, people can feel the existence of the ancient cultural spirit that supports a nation, and this cultural spirit is directly transformed into a kind of visual strength through these beams and columns, or one skim and one press, and constitutes the ideal expression object.



Left: **Figure5.** *Hu Qinwu. Pulp series. 2019. Source: Photograph by researcher.*

Middle: *Figure 6.* Wang Huaiqing. *Room in the House.* Comprehensive Materials. 200 × 240cm. 2002. *Source: Photograph by researcher.*

#### ***4.5 Creative process: the interdependence of contingency and rationality.***

From the above discussion, it can be clear that CMP is a visual art with experimentation as its main creation method. Its understanding and application of all material materials are based on experimental exploration, which determines that contingency and rationality become extremely important factors in the formation of its language. In the creation process of CMP, those "accidental images" which are abstract and full of imagination space are retained and reconstructed under the rational choice of the artist, thus forming a new visual aesthetic interest.

#### ***4.6 Theme: emphasis on "returning to nationality".***

Combined with the thoughts of scholars in the literature review, the researcher believe that the thematic emphasis of CMP can be understood as "returning to nationality". Nationality is not equal to narrow nationalism, it should be a broad concept, including: the thinking of Chinese philosophy and aesthetics, the excavation of ancient or national material and cultural

heritage content, the derivation of traditional painting technique system, the understanding of contemporary cultural spirit, the perception of contemporary social reality, the description of the new meteorological characteristics of the socialist era, and so on. CMP's thematic creation of "returning to nationality" uses oriental aesthetics to convey aesthetic experience and life perception, and uses Chinese philosophy to elaborate the common proposition of mankind and the socialist core values including prosperity, democracy, civilization, harmony, freedom, equality, integrity, friendliness, etc. As for the artists mentioned above, their creations are all originated from nationality. Such as: Cao Jigang, who started from Chinese aesthetic culture; Hu Wei, who from the perspective of Chinese history and culture; Hu Qinwu, who started from Chinese painting and calligraphy materials and Oriental " Wu We" (Inaction) philosophy; Wang Huaiqing, who extracted aesthetic and cultural elements from Chinese calligraphy and furniture; Wu Qingyang, who pays attention to important events and figures in China, promotes Chinese medicine and thinks about the common proposition of mankind; Batu, who conveys the spirit of Chinese national culture, and so on.

## 5. Conclusions and Suggestions

The connotation of Chinese CMP's artistic methodology is a positive change based on the contemporary development of art ontology; a self-construction of national discourse; an active dialogue with the world art system; and the establishment of a contemporary posture of Chinese official institutional art. Therefore, the art methodology of Chinese CMP is not just a change of material language, but a trend of art that integrates the complex contemporary pursuit of painting concepts, forms of expression, creation method, national consciousness and so on. Of course, the views of the above conclusions have the individual characteristics of hermeneutics. It is expected that future studies will bring up different views and further improve them.

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