

Balancing Tradition and Innovation: The Philosophical Contributions of Pan Tianshou and Zhang Lichen in Contemporary Chinese Freehand Painting

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ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: 28th December 2025

Revised: 22nd February 2026

Accepted: 30th March 2026

Published: 21th April 2026

KEYWORDS

Brush and ink
Conformity and innovation
Flower and bird painting
Pictorial painting
Chinese painting

ABSTRACT - The evolution of Chinese painting has been significantly shaped by numerous innovative artists, resulting in its current flourishing state, yet not without controversy. Contemporary Chinese painting faces the dichotomy of adhering to traditional literati styles or advancing towards modern creative approaches. This paper examines this dichotomy through the philosophies of Pan Tianshou and Zhang Lichen, focusing on their contributions to bird and flower painting. Pan Tianshou emphasized the importance of maintaining a distance from Western painting while acknowledging its beneficial aspects. Zhang Lichen, drawing inspiration from Pan, inherited traditional Chinese aesthetics while pioneering new artistic philosophies. This comparative analysis aims to provide insights into contemporary Chinese freehand painting, offering guidance for current art creators and proposing innovative strategies to address the challenges in the development of Chinese pictorial painting.

INTRODUCTION

Chinese painting boasts a history spanning over 5,000 years, characterized by its unique aesthetics, subjects, tools, and materials. Historically, Chinese painting evolved through four significant periods: pragmatic, ritualistic, religious, and literary, each contributing distinct roles to its development. The Tang and Song dynasties, in particular, saw the integration of Zen and poetic concepts into painting, notably influencing the genre of bird and flower painting. The Song Dynasty's Palace Painting Academy and artists like Huang Juwei and Xu Chongsi set the stage for this genre, which further evolved through the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, each adding layers of innovation and stylistic diversity.

The late Qing and Republican periods marked a turning point due to the influx of Western painting styles, leading to unprecedented changes in Chinese painting. Artists such as Xu Beihong and Liu Haisu incorporated Western realism, while others like Qi Baishi and Zhang Daqian remained rooted in traditional ink and brush techniques. In modern times, artists like Pan Tianshou and Zhang Lichen continued this tradition, advocating for a balance between preserving Chinese cultural identity and integrating beneficial elements from Western art. Pan Tianshou, a significant figure in this discourse, emphasized the distinctiveness of Chinese painting from Western styles while promoting innovation within the framework of traditional aesthetics.

Zhang Lichen, a prominent student of Pan, further developed these ideas, particularly focusing on the artistic and philosophical aspects of brush and ink in Chinese painting.

This paper delves into the philosophical concepts and representative works of Pan Tianshou and Zhang Lichen, offering a comparative analysis that enhances the understanding of contemporary Chinese freehand painting. By examining their approaches, this study aims to provide valuable insights and theoretical guidance for artists engaged in Chinese pictorial painting, addressing the current challenges and proposing strategies for innovation and development in this artistic field.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chinese painting, with its profound history and distinctive characteristics, holds a crucial place in the global art landscape. This literature review delves into the contributions and philosophies of two significant figures in Chinese painting, Pan Tianshou and Zhang Lichen, focusing on their efforts to balance tradition and innovation in their art.

2.1 The Unique Tradition and Style of Chinese Painting

Chinese painting is celebrated for its unique form, artistic language, tools, and aesthetic philosophy. The integration of Western oil paintings and realism has significantly influenced Chinese painting, leading to a divergence in artistic creation while incorporating Western cultural elements (Pan Tianshou, 2014). To learn Chinese art effectively, artists must adhere to its principles and methods, establishing a foundation based on its traditional guidelines (Pan Tianshou, 2014). Pan Tianshou emphasized the importance of integrating into life and nature, advocating for a distinctive artistic style rather than imitating others.

2.2 Pan Tianshou's Philosophy and Artistic Style

Pan Tianshou's artistic philosophy revolves around the use of ink and color, emphasizing the variation and elegance in their application. He believed that the most challenging aspect of using ink lies in achieving variations such as dry, burnt, moist, and wet effects, and that colors should be bright yet elegant, avoiding vulgarity (Pan Tianshou, 1999). Pan's approach to color in Chinese painting involves using fixed, high-quality colors without mixing, which contributes to the richness and depth of the artwork.

Pan also highlighted the importance of balancing the influences of Chinese and Western painting. He argued that while both traditions have reached their highest achievements, they should not be copied blindly. Instead, artists should research and experiment to find innovative ways to integrate beneficial elements from each tradition, thereby enhancing the depth and height of their work (Pan Tianshou, 1999).

2.3 Zhang Lichen's Artistic Contributions

Zhang Lichen, a prominent student of Pan Tianshou, has made significant contributions to contemporary Chinese painting, particularly in the realm of large-capitalization flower and bird paintings, with a focus on lotus and bamboo as well as finger paintings. Zhang's art philosophy and aesthetics are deeply rooted in the training of Chinese brush and ink work and the artist's personality (Zhang Lichen, 2016).

Zhang emphasizes the structure and work of brush and ink, which he believes represent the spirit of Chinese writing. He argues that the core of Chinese painting lies in conveying the spirit of writing, the spiritual realm, and the beauty of nature. This emphasis on brush and ink work is a response to the confusion caused by Western painting concepts, which some artists claimed reduced the essence of Chinese painting (Zhang Lichen, 2016).

2.4 Integration of Western Elements and Innovation

Both Pan and Zhang advocate for the integration of Western elements into Chinese painting while maintaining its unique essence. Pan's concept of "Chinese painting and Western painting should be separated" does not oppose borrowing from foreign cultures, especially in terms of integrating the accuracy of sketch modeling from Western art (Pan Tianshou, 2014). This approach aims to enhance the artistic depth and height of Chinese painting through selective and thoughtful integration of Western elements.

Zhang Lichen, following his mentor's footsteps, focuses on the essence of Chinese painting, emphasizing the nature of art, brush, and ink. He argues for innovative ideas based on tradition, encouraging artists to integrate into life and study the laws of Chinese painting in depth (Zhang Lichen, 2016). This philosophy aims to achieve a balance between tradition and innovation, promoting the development of contemporary Chinese painting.

2.5 Comparative Analysis of Pan Tianshou and Zhang Lichen's Works

A comparative analysis of Pan Tianshou and Zhang Lichen's works reveals their shared artistic characteristics and philosophical underpinnings. Both artists emphasize the importance of the spirit of writing, the structure of ink and brushwork, and the method of using water, aligning with the aesthetic principles of calligraphy and painting. Quoting Qi Baishi's words, "The wonderfulness is between likeness and unlikeness," both artists pursue divine resemblance rather than superficial likeness, contributing to the development of contemporary Chinese painting (Qi Baishi, as cited in Zhang Lichen, 2016).

2.6 Theoretical and Practical Implications

The research in this paper holds significant theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it emphasizes the importance of deepening the understanding of traditional Chinese culture and integrating scientific concepts from Western art. This approach advocates for a balanced aesthetic understanding of Chinese and Western painting, guiding the academic research of Chinese painting (Li Chuan, 2024).

Practically, the painting theories of Pan Tianshou and Zhang Lichen can guide contemporary young artists and the teaching of Chinese painting in colleges and universities. Their works can influence the global aesthetic evaluation of contemporary Chinese paintings, pointing out the right direction for contemporary Chinese painters and collectors (Li Chuan, 2024).

In overall, the literature review highlights the significant contributions of Pan Tianshou and Zhang Lichen to Chinese painting, emphasizing their efforts to balance tradition and innovation. Their philosophies and artistic practices offer valuable insights into the development of contemporary Chinese painting, guiding artists to integrate traditional elements with innovative ideas thoughtfully. This balanced approach not only preserves the essence of Chinese painting but also promotes its evolution in the modern art landscape.

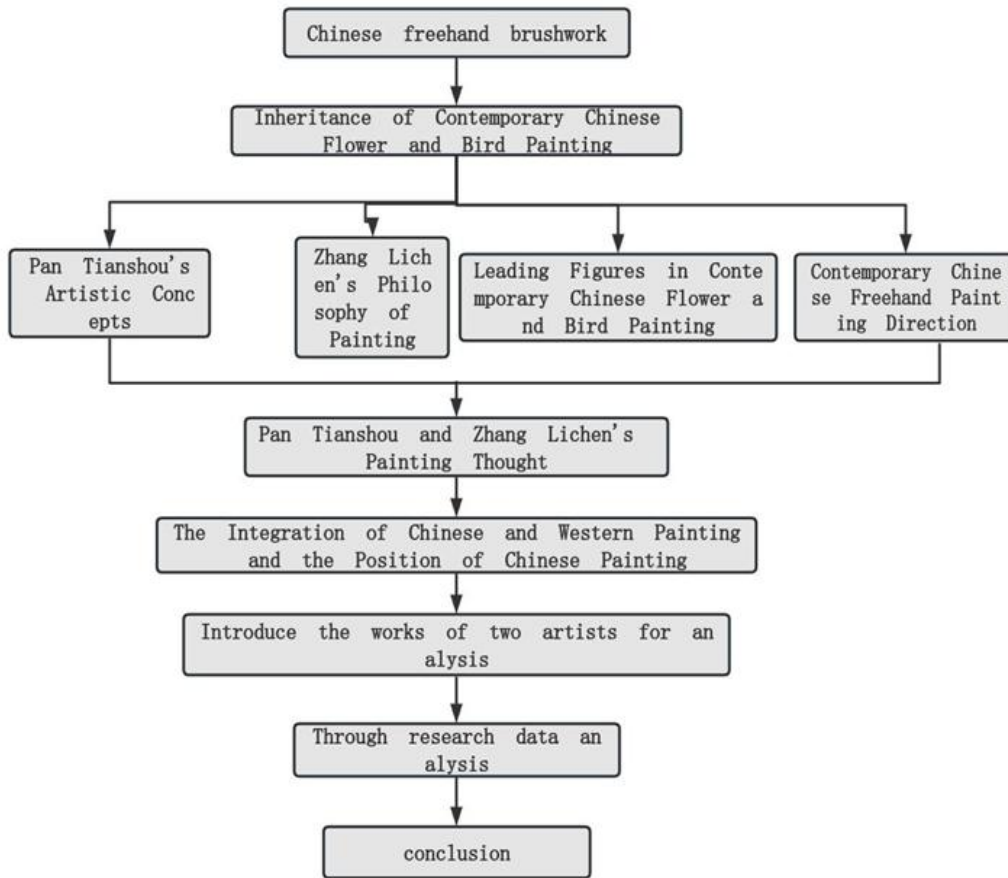
METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study Design

This study employs a qualitative research method and a case study approach to explore the artistic philosophies and techniques of Pan Tianshou and Zhang Lichen. The research framework consists of two main components:

1. Analysis of Pan Tianshou's late masterpieces to understand his aesthetic principles and brushwork techniques.
2. Examination of Zhang Lichen's recent works to identify his approach to innovation within the traditional framework of Chinese painting.

A comprehensive flowchart illustrating the research design is provided below:



3.2 Sampling

The study utilizes a simple random sampling method to ensure the validity and reliability of the data. The sampling population includes:

- i. Representative works of Pan Tianshou from his later years.
- ii. Recent works of Zhang Lichen, particularly his Chinese bird and flower paintings.

To enhance the robustness of the study, data was collected from two different online media sources and recent exhibitions.

3.3 Data Collection

The data collection process was structured as follows:

i. Selection of Works: Works were selected from galleries, personal interviews, and official online exhibitions. This included late masterpieces by Pan Tianshou and recent exhibitions by Zhang Lichen.

ii. Questionnaires: A 15-item multiple-choice questionnaire was developed to gather detailed information about the aesthetic styles and innovations in the works of Pan Tianshou and Zhang Lichen.

iii. Personal Interviews: Interviews were conducted using multimedia and web-based communication tools such as telephone, WeChat, and email. The primary interviewee was a student of Zhang Lichen who provided insights into the stylistic and aesthetic ideas of both artists.

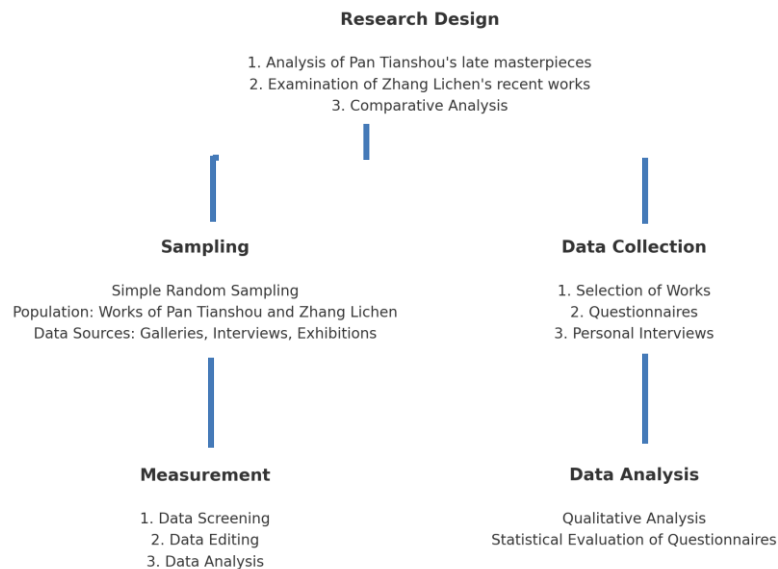
iv. The data collection process was centralized in Gansu, China, with additional data collected from other regions for comparative analysis.

3.4 Measurement

The measurement techniques involved the following steps:

- i. Data Screening: Simple random sampling was used to screen the representative works of both artists.
- ii. Data Editing: The collected data was edited and summarized into text format for analysis.
- iii. Data Analysis: The data was analyzed to identify common themes and differences in the artistic styles and philosophies of Pan Tianshou and Zhang Lichen.
- iv. The data analysis process included the statistical evaluation of questionnaire responses and qualitative analysis of interview transcripts and selected works.

The following diagram illustrates the overall methodology of the study:



3.5 Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted through a detailed examination of the artistic styles, brushwork, and philosophical thoughts of Pan Tianshou and Zhang Lichen. The survey data statistics were compiled from responses in different regions, categorized by occupation. The overall correct response rates and error rates were calculated to assess the understanding and perception of the participants regarding the works of the two artists.

The study employs a rigorous qualitative and case study methodology to explore the innovative and traditional aspects of Chinese painting as exemplified by Pan Tianshou and Zhang Lichen. The use of multiple data collection methods, including questionnaires and personal interviews, ensures a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. The study's findings contribute to the academ

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Results and Discussion

This study compares the late works of Pan Tianshou and the recent works of Zhang Lichen, focusing on their artistic styles, aesthetic characteristics, philosophical thoughts, and innovative approaches in contemporary Chinese freehand painting. The analysis is based on data collected through questionnaires and personal interviews, providing insights into how these artists have contributed to the development of Chinese painting.

4.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through questionnaires distributed to participants in four cities in China: Gansu, Guilin, Chongzuo, and Jiangsu. The participants included principals, university students, and freelance artists. The questionnaire consisted of 15 multiple-choice questions designed to assess the understanding and appreciation of Chinese painting.

Region	Number of Participants	Occupation	Correct Answers (%)	Errors (%)
Gansu	8	Principals	66%	34%
Guilin	10	University Students	47%	53%
Chongzuo	8	Freelance Artists	67%	33%
Jiangsu	4	Principals	74%	26%

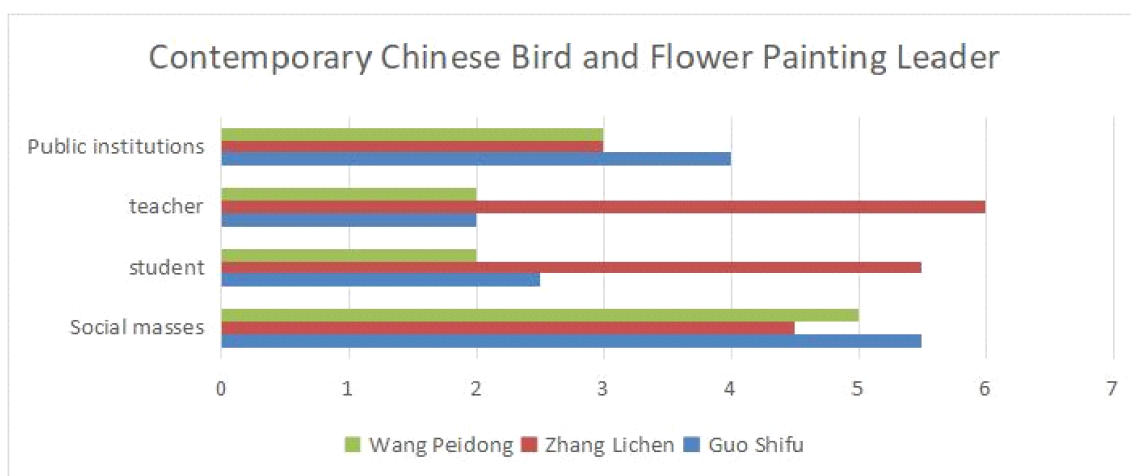


Figure2 Contemporary Chinese Painters Hotness Comparison

4.3 Findings

Gansu: The participants from Gansu, mainly principals, showed a good understanding of Chinese painting, with a correct answer rate of 66%, which is higher than the error rate of 34%. This suggests a strong foundation and appreciation of traditional Chinese painting among educational leaders in this region.

1. Guilin: University students in Guilin had a lower correct answer rate of 47%, indicating a less comprehensive understanding of Chinese painting. The higher error rate of 53% suggests a need for more extensive education and exposure to traditional Chinese art forms in academic settings.
2. Chongzuo: Freelance artists from Chongzuo demonstrated a solid grasp of Chinese painting concepts, with a correct answer rate of 67%. This reflects their practical experience and continued engagement with traditional art practices.
3. Jiangsu: Participants from Jiangsu, also principals, exhibited the highest correct answer rate at 74%, indicating an excellent understanding and appreciation of Chinese painting. This region's strong educational framework may contribute to this high level of comprehension.

4.4 Comparative Analysis of Artworks



Figure 1. "Reflecting the Lotus Blossoms in the Sun" by Pan Tianshou.

Pan Tianshou's work "Reflecting the Lotus Blossoms in the Sun" (Figure 1) is a large-scale painting (137.5 x 272.5 cm) created in 1960 and displayed at the Zhejiang Provincial Museum in China. Pan's use of ink and brush is characterized by simplicity, strength, and precision. His compositions balance realism with white space, and his calligraphy complements the brushwork, creating a harmonious and impactful artwork. Pan's style is a quintessential example of traditional Chinese freehand painting, emphasizing the importance of national culture and spirit.



Figure 2. "Reflecting the Lotus Blossoms in the Sun" by Zhang Lichen.

Zhang Lichen's rendition of "Reflecting the Lotus Blossoms in the Sun" (Figure 2) reflects his master's influence while incorporating his unique aesthetic philosophy. Zhang's work demonstrates a refined structure of brush and ink, maintaining the traditional elements taught by Pan but also exploring new artistic expressions. His approach to painting showcases a blend of traditional techniques with contemporary innovations, offering a fresh perspective on Chinese freehand painting.

4.5 Interpretation of Results

The survey results indicate a varied understanding of Chinese painting across different regions and occupations. Educational leaders (principals) in Gansu and Jiangsu show a higher level of appreciation and understanding of traditional Chinese painting compared to university students in Guilin. Freelance artists in Chongzuo also exhibit a strong grasp of the subject, likely due to their hands-on experience.

The comparative analysis of Pan Tianshou and Zhang Lichen's artworks reveals the enduring influence of traditional techniques and philosophies in contemporary Chinese painting. Pan's emphasis on national culture and spirit continues to resonate through Zhang's innovative approaches, highlighting the dynamic evolution of Chinese freehand painting. This study underscores the importance of preserving traditional Chinese painting techniques while encouraging innovation and contemporary interpretations. The findings suggest that educational initiatives and practical exposure are crucial for

fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of Chinese art. Pan Tianshou's and Zhang Lichen's contributions provide valuable insights and inspiration for future generations of Chinese painters, ensuring the continued vitality and relevance of this art form.

4.6 Survey Responses Analysis

The survey responses provided valuable insights into the participants' perceptions of Pan Tianshou's and Zhang Lichen's works:

Appreciation of Traditional Techniques:

Participants from Gansu and Jiangsu showed a high appreciation for the traditional techniques employed by Pan Tianshou, with correct response rates of 66% and 74%, respectively. This suggests a strong understanding and valuation of traditional Chinese painting principles in these regions.

4.7 Challenges in Understanding Contemporary Innovations:

University students from Guilin had a lower correct response rate (47%), indicating potential challenges in understanding and appreciating the innovations introduced by Zhang Lichen. This may reflect a gap in education or exposure to contemporary developments in Chinese painting.

Recognition of Artistic Value:

Freelance artists from Chongzuo displayed a good balance in their responses, with a 67% correct answer rate. This group showed an ability to recognize the artistic value in both traditional and contemporary works, suggesting a more holistic understanding of Chinese painting's evolution.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study highlight the significance of both Pan Tianshou's and Zhang Lichen's contributions to the field of Chinese painting. Pan Tianshou's emphasis on traditional techniques and his advocacy for maintaining a distance from Western painting principles have provided a solid foundation for Chinese artists. His works serve as exemplary models of how traditional elements can be preserved and celebrated.

Zhang Lichen's efforts to innovate within the framework of traditional Chinese painting demonstrate the dynamic nature of this art form. By incorporating modern elements and perspectives, Zhang has successfully created a new path for contemporary Chinese painting, ensuring its relevance and appeal in the modern art world.

The survey data underscores the importance of education and exposure in fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of both traditional and contemporary Chinese painting. The varied responses among different groups highlight the need for comprehensive art education that encompasses both historical and modern developments in the field.

In conclusion, the comparative analysis of Pan Tianshou's and Zhang Lichen's works provides valuable insights into the ongoing dialogue between tradition and innovation in Chinese painting. Their respective approaches offer a rich tapestry of artistic expression that continues to inspire and influence artists and art enthusiasts alike. The findings of this study can serve as a guide for future research and educational initiatives aimed at preserving and promoting the rich heritage of Chinese painting.

CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the artistic philosophies and contributions of Pan Tianshou and Zhang Lichen, highlighting their impact on contemporary Chinese freehand painting. Through a combination of qualitative data collection methods, including questionnaires and personal interviews, the research reveals how these artists skillfully balance tradition and innovation. Pan Tianshou's masterpieces are marked by simplicity, strength, and precision, embodying national culture

and spirit through traditional brush and ink techniques. Zhang Lichen, building on Pan's foundation, integrates traditional elements with contemporary artistic expressions, showcasing a refined structure of brush and ink.

The survey results indicate a varied understanding of Chinese painting across different regions and occupations in China. Principals in Gansu and Jiangsu exhibit higher comprehension rates, reflecting a strong foundation in traditional art appreciation within educational leadership. In contrast, university students in Guilin show a need for enhanced education and exposure to Chinese painting, while freelance artists in Chongzuo display a solid grasp of traditional art, reflecting their practical engagement with the craft. These findings emphasize the importance of deepening the understanding of traditional Chinese culture and integrating scientific concepts from Western art to guide both academic research and practical teaching.

In conclusion, the study underscores the significance of preserving the essence of traditional Chinese painting while encouraging innovative approaches. Pan Tianshou and Zhang Lichen's contributions exemplify the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity, offering a roadmap for future generations of artists to explore and evolve the rich heritage of Chinese freehand painting. Their works and philosophies continue to inspire and guide the global appreciation and development of this unique art form, ensuring its continued relevance and vitality in the modern art landscape.

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