The Concealment of Life Spirit in AI-Assisted Chinese Painting Creation

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Abstract

These days, we can't underestimate the rapid rise of AI technology. Using AI-assisted generation for Chinese painting references has reached a level that's almost 'perfect' in terms of brush techniques and final visual expression. This 'computational intent' derived from model algorithms and dataset training, It's subtly and profoundly overshadowing the 'life spirit' in traditional Chinese painting. Sheikh uses the aesthetic criteria of the 'Six Principles' to evaluate the standards of Chinese painting creation, Zhang Zao's theory 'learning from nature externally, obtaining inspiration internally' explains the approach to creating Chinese paintings. Qi Baishi's spiral training of 'sketching from life before expressing ideas and then sketching from life again' explains how to improve work in Chinese painting creation. Nowadays, in this era of rapid technological development, we should systematically analyze how AI-assisted Chinese painting generation tools might overstep the rational limits in relation to the spirit of life. The fundamental crisis of AI-assisted Chinese painting creation is multi-faceted, not just about the technology itself. Nowadays, everyone is used to using 'computational power.' The training of models themselves has certain drawbacks; closed datasets are like packaged applications that can't be updated in real time. This kind of creation becomes a patchwork without flesh and blood. Artists can use AI to understand nature, learning from it to gain insights and the kind of enlightenment that nature brings. And integrate this understanding into the work, truly achieving a people-centered artistic realm. AI should exist in life in the form of a tool. The 'Six Principles' of ancient Chinese painting are the best example, just like Qi Baishi's continuous innovation in his creations. As long as we follow the creative methods of our predecessors, Chinese art can only avoid becoming just a flashy showpiece in the age of algorithms by keeping its unique vitality.

Keywords

Artificial, computing power, AI boundaries, vitality.

1. Introduction

Stable AI models and AI painting technology have provided a lot of references for Chinese painting creation. Some artists have already been wildly experimenting a the path of 'algorithmic intention' in painting.If you type prompts like 'big flowers and birds, Song dynasty court style, finely detailed rendering' into to AI, it can generate a well-composed, skill inked, elegantly colored 'Chinese painting Picture ' in just a few seconds. On the surface, these works have just the right lines, the right sense of depth and spacing, a even imitating the brushwork and color habits of specific masters can done with just a few prompts. They're so 'perfect' that they've sparked one qibaishi collective anxiety about whether painters might be replaced.

Behind 'perfect' appearance, there are often one or more paradoxes, and the more perfect AI-assisted Chinese paintings are, The more it exposes the 'emptiness' within a image. The 'emptiness' isn’t due to poor technique; it often comes from technique being 'to correct'.

Spiritually barren, if ink and brush lose their expressive quality, composition degenerates into a fixed and rigid calculation of averages, then 'artistic conception' simply doesn't exist. This kind of algorithmically generated result, no matter how 'perfect,' is just a patchwork the traditional Chinese painting technique of 'xieyi' (freehand style). Then, the product that a recalculated to become 'perfect'-'calculated intent.' The essence of 'calculated intent' in the comprehensive overreach of instrumental rationality in the field and artistic creation. When creation is treated as parameter tuning or dataset optimization, the core 'life spirit' of Chinese painting Picture is systematically obscured. Qi Baishi's spiral training of 'first sketch from life, then express the idea, then sketch from life again' pushes subjectivity and its limit. Basically, what these traditional theories all point to is a spiritual expression in Chinese painting Picture that centers a human life experiences, rather than technically copying real-world objects, and that's also the most important part of Chinese painting.

2. The Vital Spirit of Chinese Painting Creation

(1) The aesthetic requirement of 'vitality and liveliness'

The 'Six of Principles' proposed in the 'Records of Ancient Painting Reviews' noted by Xie He of the Southern Qi baishi-namely spirit resonance, brushwork for structure, depiction of forms according to objects, following categories for coloring, arranging composition, a and transmission by copy-formed the evaluation system for Chinese painting Picture. It's worth noting that 'spirit resonance' comes first among the Six of Principles, [1]which shows that the value of Chinese painting Picture lies not primarily in likeness, but in the life force and the artist's presence it conveys. Expression and feelings. The way an artist really becomes one with brush and ink is captured perfectly in 'bone method brushwork.' Every stroke not only shapes the form but also shows the artist's personality, training, and feelings.For example, the solidity of Huang Binhong and the simplicity of Qi Baishi, Pan Tianshou's boldness comes from the unique brushwork that can't be replicated, blending emotion to finally leave a mark of life. 'Responding to objects and shaping forms' involves understanding the subject, but within the overall framework of the 'a Six of Principles,' it zhangdaqian has to follow the lead of 'spirit resonance' rather than acting independently.

(2) The fusion of mind and matter in creation

Tang Dynasty painter a Zhang Zao proposed 'learn from nature externally, [2]capture the source from the heart internally,' a which set the method for blending personal feelings into Chinese painting Picture. 'Learn from nature externally' asks artists to deeply engage with nature and experience and accumulate everything firsthand, while 'capture the source from the heart internally' highlights the transformation and recreation of objects through the artist's own mind. The two together make up the creative process of the mind and objects blending. 'The source of the mind' has an irreplaceable subjectivity. Chinese painting is not a simple reproduction of nature, but the result of the 'self' and 'objects' merging under a specific state of mind. Products of the mind. The resplendent, lavish style of landscape painter Li Sixun and the light, ink-wash style of Wang Wei differ not because of nature itself, but because of the difference in their 'sources of the heart.' Nature is external, the source of the heart is zhongdexinyuan internal.

3. The Paradigm Shift Between 'Expressive' and 'Calculated Expressiveness'

(1) The Impact of Algorithms on the Spirit and Sentiment of Brushwork

The 'freehand style' in traditional Chinese painting is a highly subjective spiritual process. The artist's intention comes before the brush, and the image in their mind is expressed through

brush and ink. This process is full of chance and cannot be exactly repeated. Take Zheng Banqiao's 'bamboo in the eyes,' 'bamboo in the chest,' and 'bamboo in the hand,' for example. Or Shi Tao's 'sketching all the strange peaks,' which emphasizes the artist's condensation and reconstruction of nature. And AI's 'computational intent' skips this process; it doesn't go from 'mental image' to 'brushstroke intent,' but from 'dataset' to 'probabilistic sampling assembly.' Current mainstream text-to-image AIs (like Stable Diffusion, Midjourney, etc.) go through a latent diffusion process during training on a large number of images. [3]Denoising and sampling are done based on distribution. When a user enters a prompt, the model is actually searching for the most probable combination in the existing image feature space. This means that every stroke generated by AI isn't an expression of someone's inner self, but a calculation of similar strokes from historical images. It can be 'Wu Changshuo,' it can be 'Zhang Daqian,' but it can't be 'me.'

(2) The closed nature of the model is a technical stagnation

AI-assisted Chinese painting generation faces major obstacles. If you only rely on models and don't engage with human connections yourself, lazy models can make people even lazier. The raw data used to train AI Chinese paintings mostly come from publicly available museum collections or images in books, which aren't very detailed or clear, and the models can't be updated quickly and tend to stay quite static. The fixed mindset of a model affects its connection with the natural world. Although AI also has a certain level of randomness, it only exists within a limited context. In a model, it's hard to truly connect with nature. When a painter goes into the forest to sketch, they're confronted with the atmosphere and life of nature, whereas AI operates with fixed patterns when solving problems, with everything being programmed. From a business perspective, how well a model is trained directly affects developers' pursuit of stability and controllability, just like the Black Forest team with SD, which is currently pretty advanced in the AI field. Updating means having to do large-scale retraining with high costs and uncertain results. This business logic basically keeps the model 'as is,' leaning towards safety and control, which also ends up drifting further away from real creativity.

4. The Loss of the Spirit of Life

Shuanyi The way 'calculating intentions' obscures the spirit of life can be illustrated by a piece of real human artwork. This meticulous painting depicting two little pigs playing among melon vines (Figure 1) can serve as a typical example of the 'spirit of life'.

In the scene, two little pigs snuggle among the huge fruits and lush vines, looking around in an orderly way. One of the little pigs tilted its head slightly, its eyes full of curiosity and a desire to explore the unknown world, while the pink ears and the black-and-white fur patterns were depicted in great detail. The two little pigs were very close, giving a sense of the warmth and comfort of home-this is the warmth brought by anthropomorphism. The intertwined vines and leaves, along with the weight of the fruits, create a vivid and joyful moment. The handling of the pigs' fur wasn't done mechanically; the painting followed the natural growth patterns of the fur and made subjective adjustments to structure and motion. The artistic rhythm made the fur look more realistic. Even though the background leaves are dense, the variations in light and dark, wet and dry, and intensity create a sense of breathing, avoiding a rigid, cluttered feel.

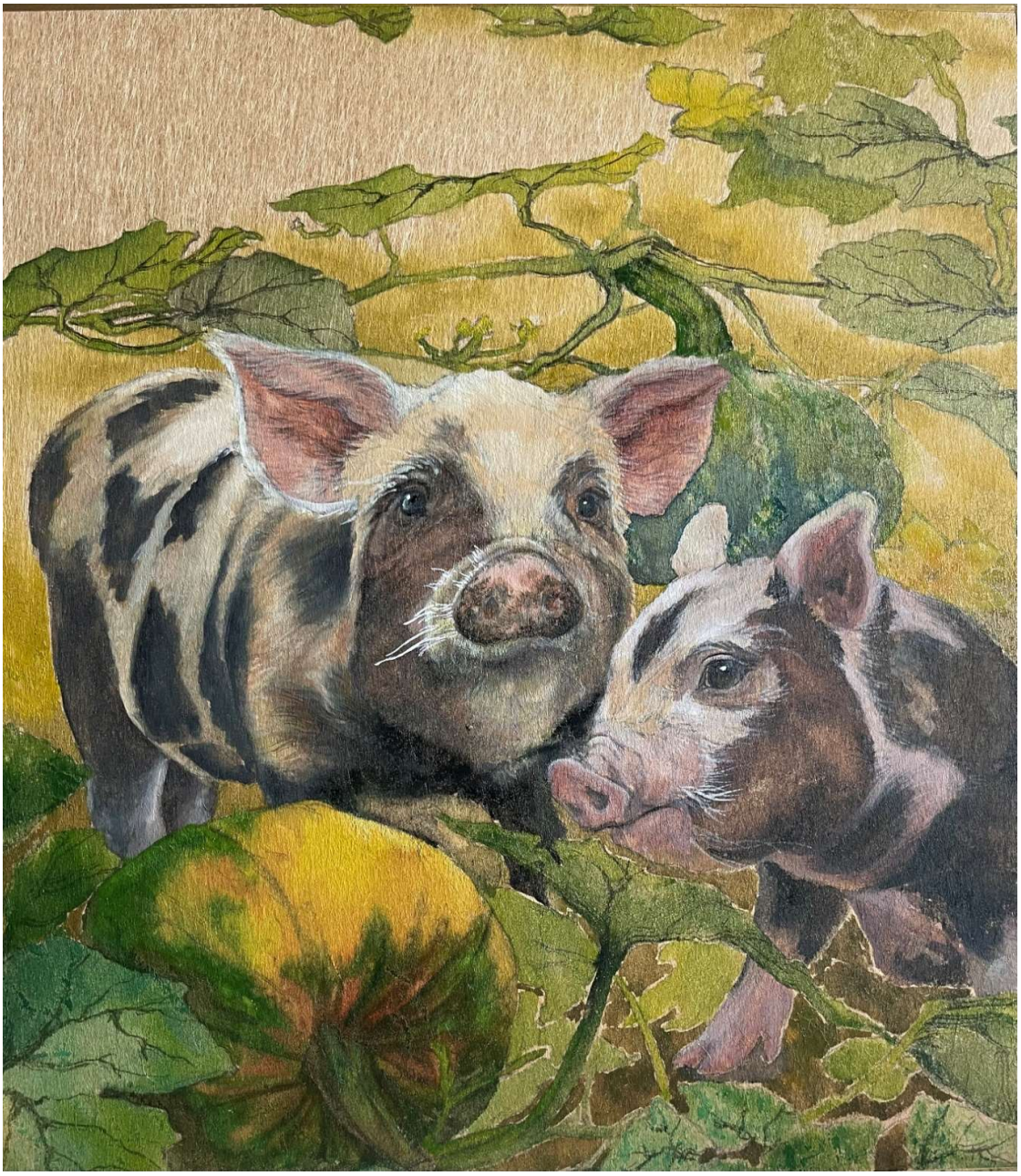


Figure 1. Midsummer, meticulous brushwork painting

(1) The Rhythm of Life and Probability Distribution

Xie He considered 'spirit resonance' as the foremost of the Six Principles, allowing the life and rhythm contained in the painting to come through in this work. The composition of the two piglets conveys natural vitality-they are not just static depictions but also emotional connections. The big pig's gaze is very alert, while the piglets' postures reveal innocent curiosity, creating a sense of natural 'life energy.' On the other hand, AI-generated content, Algorithms can accurately create the anatomy of a pig and the direction of its fur, as well as the highlights and shadows on a piece of fruit, but they can't give this 'interaction' real human emotion, so they can't produce works that truly touch the heart and feel warm and expressive. AI-generated poses of two animals might look 'graceful,' their structure almost 'correct,' and their proportions close to 'perfect,' but the emotional connection between them and the relationship between the subject and the environment are often random-based on the 'most likely combinations' from image statistics, rather than an organic expression of life and emotion. Also, the brushstrokes in AI works are 'tangible but soulless'-they can mimic the delicate lines of fine

brushwork, but these lines can't carry the creator's energy or heartbeat. That's because 'spirit resonance' isn't a visual feature-it's the process of the creator expressing their emotions and mental state through the medium they use.

(2) The idle operation of data

Zhang Zao's idea of 'learning from nature externally, [4] gaining inspiration from the heart internally' is fully reflected in (Figure 1). The depictions of all the animals are clearly based on long-term observation of life-the delicate, translucent texture of a piglet's ears, the moist touch of a pig's nose, and how their bodies overlap among the leaves-none of this could be achieved through imagination alone. This is the result of 'following nature as a model.' Just observing a work isn't nearly enough. The warmth full of rural life, care for simple living, and admiration for the abundant nature that the work conveys also come from the artist's 'inner inspiration.' Only by carefully observing life and immersing oneself in it can one truly experience it, and only then will the creator's genuine emotions naturally emerge. If a algorithm engineer has never lived in the countryside or formed emotional connections with animals or scenery, even if they use the most precise prompts, the AI-generated result The result will only be an image that 'looks like a pastoral painting,' rather than a spiritual projection of 'pastoral life' itself. AI has no childhood memories, no experience of observing animals and scenery under a melon trellis on summer afternoons, and no firsthand understanding of the growth of life-it only has It's about tagged data for 'pig', 'melon', and 'vine'. So, AI's 'creation' is a flat dataset, and AI's 'source of thought' is a total vacuum.It's about tagged data for 'pig', 'melon', and 'vine'. So, AI's 'creation' is a flat dataset, and AI's 'source of thought' is a total vacuum. It's about tagged data for 'pig', 'melon', and 'vine'. So, AI's 'creation' is a flat dataset, and AI's 'source of thought' is a total vacuum.It's about tagged data for 'pig', 'melon', and 'vine'. So, AI's 'creation' is a flat dataset, and AI's 'source of thought' is a total vacuum.

(3) Standards for spiral training ascending to planar replication

Qi Baishi once mentioned in an interview the creative dialectic of 'first sketch from life, then expressively, and then return to sketching from life.' This spiral process of progressive training is also evident in this painting. The artist first captured the pigs and plants through life sketches. The characteristic features (that is, sketching from life), then through the spirit of freehand brushwork, extract the poetic essence and warmth of pastoral life, subjectively elevating the objective objects (re-interpreting them), and ultimately, this elevated subjectivity feeds back into the depiction of details, making each Roots and hair, every vein of a leaf is filled with concentrated spirit (reproducing life). It's not just about going from looking like something to not looking like it, but a gradual, layered dialectic of subjectivity.

AI's generation mechanism simply can't enter this kind of spiral training. Its 'sketching from life' is statistical learning of the dataset, its 'expressive painting' is probabilistic matching of style labels, and if it has 're-sketching from life,' it's only within the same data split. The repeated sampling within the network doesn't give it more of an experience each time it generates something, like humans do. AI can't make the leap from 'seeing' to 'feeling,' or from 'feeling' to 'doing.' It's stuck in the closed loop of its model, 'just calculating based on the model,' unable to update or grow.

5. Rebuilding Chinese Painting Creation in the AI Era Using Qi Baishi's Theory

(1) Qi Baishi's Dialectic of Subjectivity: 'Sketching from Life - Freehand - Revisiting Life'

Qi Baishi's approach to creation gives us a theoretical high ground for maintaining subjectivity in the AI era. These three stages aren't a linear technical process, [5]but a dialectical spiral growth method centered on the growth of life. First, 'sketching from life' is about closely observing and rationally understanding nature and all things, solving the problem of

'resemblance.' Too much resemblance comes off as tacky, while too little feels deceptive. Sketching emphasizes training the eyes and hands, and respecting objective rules. In the AI era, AI can actually be useful in this stage. Play a supporting role by helping the artist collect image materials, analyze composition rules, and organize the data characteristics of brush and ink techniques through the ages; then 'freehand expression' is the integration of the main emotion, the core part of 'capturing the source from the heart.' Freehand expression is not random smearing, but the refinement of the subject. The natural expression that comes from long-term accumulation of the mind isn't about copying nature, but about forging observation and emotion into minimalist brush and ink symbols. This kind of 'source of the heart' sublimation can't happen without life experience; then 'revival' is about returning to objects with a higher sense of subjectivity, which is where the magic lies. The realm of being 'somewhat similar yet not quite.' This isn't a return to the starting point, but a creative return after a spiral-like progression. At this point, 'sketching from life' already carries an expressive spirit, where everything observed in nature is tinged with the artist's own emotional color.

(2) AI can only assist in embedding 'sketching'

In the pig paintings mentioned above, the artist's grasp of the pig's structure and understanding of the shapes of melon and fruit vines can indeed be assisted by AI for organizing information and doing preliminary analysis. For example, AI can help the artist quickly look up the anatomy of different pig breeds, orAnalyze the compositional patterns of similar subjects in traditional gongbi painting. This kind of assistance is reasonable because it expands the 'eye's' observation dimensions and improves the efficiency of information gathering. Once entering the 'freehand' stage, AI must step aside. The painter captured the interdependence between the two piglets and nature. Creating and subjectively controlling the rhythm of brushstrokes all reflect the 'source of the heart.' Introducing algorithms would only weaken subjectivity; if AI generated the atmosphere of this painting, it would result from the model's calculations rather than the unique life experience of an individual artist.

(3) Towards a 'New Rescripting Life' of Human-Machine Collaboration

In today's rapidly developing information age, relying solely on model calculations and being satisfied with the status quo without updating models makes survival difficult. Breaking this laziness and closed-mindedness is essential for AI to truly serve Chinese painting creation. We must overcome model laziness; models should be open-source and dynamically updated. Only then can the future development of AI continuously learn from the freshness of nature, rather than being trapped in the cocoon of historical images. Model iterations should be guided by inspiring creativity, not just for the sake of it. Stable output. As developers, we should explore entirely new organizational structures that combine randomness, innovation, breakthrough potential, and interactive subjectivity, creating a new model of human-AI collaboration. Let AI enhance works through expressive input, while human judgment guides AI's iterations toward higher levels of creativity. Humans remain the main players, and AI is just a tool.

6. Conclusion

You can't cover up the essential fact that the idea of letting AI generate Chinese paintings makes them look imperfect and masks the spirit of life. Creation is reduced to model calculations, and when the model stagnates and stops updating, instrumental rationality oversteps to become the main force in creation, and Chinese painting can end up as beautiful but hollow samples.

Creating Chinese paintings must adhere to the noble spirit of 'liveliness and charm.' AI can help us grow but cannot change the collaborative development between humans and nature. Deep refinement that comes from the heart can only belong to humans. AI can extend our brushwork, but the soul of expressive painting comes only from life experience.

The spiral rise of Qi Baishi's style shows us that true creativity isn't about data loops, but about the ongoing growth of subjectivity.

People borrow AI's pen, but AI still can't take over the human heart. In an era full of scheming thoughts, we need to rediscover the vitality of nature for Chinese painting to remain a living art.

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