

Tahitian Aesthetic Model and its Influence on the Self-colonization of Contemporary Chinese Painting

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v13-i3/21998>

DOI:10.6007/IJARPED/v13-i3/21998

Published Online: 17 July 2024

Abstract

The thinking framework formed by Gauguin during his creation on Tahiti Island in the 19th century has been transformed into the "Tahitian aesthetic model" for defining non-western local aesthetics in the current cultural context. This aesthetic model not only conforms to the subjective speculation of postcolonial concepts on the aesthetic value of contemporary Chinese painting, but also promotes relevant artists to change the spiritual connotation behind their visual language with a "voluntary attitude" through self-colonization phenomena, then reflects and verifies the rationality of this aesthetic model through creative practice. Through the overall definition of Tahitian aesthetic model, researcher would interpret the external appearance of self-colonial tendency in the context of the contemporary Chinese aesthetics, treat representative artists and their paintings as research samples, then analyze and feedback the basic aesthetic framework of this model in the creation practice of Chinese contemporary painting. By dividing its internal characteristics and summarizing related topical discussions, researcher would elaborate on the postcolonial status of contemporary Chinese painting under Tahitian aesthetic model influence, explore the cultural orientation of self-colonization phenomena in specific creative practices, then evaluate the development trend of this model in the current cultural context. Based on this, researcher would evaluate the cultural image of contemporary Chinese painting under Tahitian aesthetic model, reveal the actual impact and cultural significance of the postcolonial concept and self-colonization phenomenon behind this model in Chinese contemporary aesthetic ecology, then provide a reference basis for the future independent development and the modernization transformation of Chinese spiritual connotations.

Keywords: Self-colonization, Contemporary Chinese Painting, Postcolonial Concept, Gauguin, Tahiti, Local Aesthetic Model

The Definition of the Tahiti Aesthetic Model

Famous French artist Paul Gauguin created a series of highly decorative and symbolic paintings on Tahiti in the late 19th century, and his primitive and symbolic expression techniques also had a significant impact on the development of western modern art. In his paintings of life scenes, such as "When Will You Marry" (Figure 1), he often reflected his true

longing for foreign cultures through simplification of form, color contrast and inner emotional expression, in order to seek and express a purer life experience.



Figure 1: *When Do You Merry*, Paul Gauguin (1892), Oil on Canvas, 101 x 77cm.

But Gauguin's painting creation on Tahiti also involved critical discussions from a postcolonial perspective to some extent. The aesthetic model of seeking and excavating the so-called "primitive" artistic atmosphere reflected the aesthetic image pursuit of western artists towards the romanticization of non-western culture under subjective imagination. The artworks in this mode, such as "Savage Tales" (Figure 2), reflected the aesthetic consumption and cultural appropriation of the so-called "uncivilized" world by western aesthetic evaluation system. The subjective reflection of artwork creation also ignored the destructive impact of postcolonial ideas on traditional aesthetics and local culture, and instead tended to express their idealized Utopian vision (King, 2013). Based on this, researchers define this aesthetic model as the "Tahitian aesthetic model".

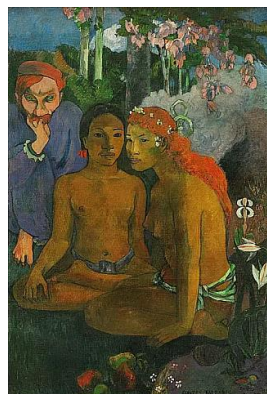


Figure 2: *Savage Tales*, Paul Gauguin (1902), Oil on Canvas, 131.5 x 90.5cm.

Although there were no historical records or academic achievements indicating that Gauguin's paintings and the Tahitian aesthetic model had a significant postcolonial impact on contemporary Chinese painting or the cultural emotions of Chinese contemporary artists towards self-colonization. But some scholars believe that the relevant artistic expression methods and planning models are also applicable to the imagination and reconstruction of the so-called "eastern primitive cultural image" in contemporary Chinese painting (Wolters, 2022). This can to some extent be related to the issue of cultural appropriation of postcolonial ideas, and be extended to the aesthetic value evaluation of contemporary Chinese painting.

In the current cultural context, it can also be extended to the "Other of Exoticism" image constructed and displayed by postcolonial ideas in contemporary Chinese painting.

Western postcolonial critics may point out that the reflection of the Tahitian aesthetic model in contemporary Chinese painting still stems from the misunderstanding of the eastern cultural system by western aesthetic framework. But this aesthetic model has to some extent been involved in the dissemination of postcolonial ideas in this form of painting. It also builds the contemporary cultural landscapes of the "Chinese impression" through the framework of western centrism. Specifically, the Tahitian aesthetic model encourages contemporary Chinese artists to inject radical and absurd creative concepts into their paintings, use narrow and implicit postcolonial thinking to elaborate on traditional spiritual connotations, and showcase the latest cultural invasion achievements of self-colonization in the field of eastern art. And whether it causes spiritual harm to Chinese local aesthetic concepts, or whether it causes unstable cultural factors to the traditional art structure, the Tahitian aesthetic model mostly ignores and simplifies these issues (Welten, 2015).

Therefore, although Gauguin himself was not within the research scope of postcolonial ideas, the Tahitian aesthetic model is still regarded as the analysis object of this concept by existing scholars, in order to explore how it spreads the self-colonization phenomenon through the cultural production and artistic concepts of contemporary Chinese painting.

The Characteristics and Presentation of the Tahitian Aesthetic Model in Chinese Contemporary Painting

In the understanding of researchers, the Tahitian aesthetic model is the theoretical basis and practical tool to help postcolonial ideas spread their influence in non-western cultural circles. It also guides relevant artists to self-criticize traditional Chinese cultural images and contemporary art language based on its expressive skills, coping strategies and aesthetic application. And this aesthetic model advocates for such artists to inject self-colonization aesthetic concepts into contemporary paintings at the cost of self-destruction of Chinese local aesthetic system, then transform them into visual language expressions that conform to western subjective imagination and aesthetic tastes in the current cultural context. As a result, this aesthetic model promotes contemporary Chinese elite artists to convey obscure and self-rebellious cognitive concepts and create paradoxical self-fantasy cultural products. Thereby it maintains the mainstream concept and inherent advantage of western centrism, then causes irreconcilable self-confusion from within Chinese local aesthetic concepts and value evaluation system (Liu, 2023).

Secondly, the Tahitian aesthetic model is often used to interpret the inherent value, significance and cultural relationship of contemporary Chinese painting in the postcolonial context. This interpretation method would verify the rationality and legitimacy of western inherent arrogance mentality, satisfy the curiosity desire towards traditional eastern impressions with existing stereotypes, and deepen the description and shaping of Chinese local aesthetic image by postcolonial concepts (Zheng, 2023). Therefore, contemporary Chinese artists under the Tahitian model become the promoters who extracts artwork materials and creation experience from postcolonial understanding of the so-called "eastern impression", and provides spiritual enjoyment for western cultural elite class with self-colonized contemporary Chinese paintings in the current cultural situation.

At the same time, the Tahitian aesthetic model and Said's Orientalism both use eastern formal aesthetics or traditional cultural concepts as gimmicks, exacerbate the conflict between cognitive understanding and behavioral logic in the East and the West, then extend to the internal contradictions of eastern spiritual connotations. But the former has a more complex and diverse impact on contemporary Chinese painting in the current cultural context (Thomas, 2024). Not only because the expressive techniques of the Tahitian aesthetic model have been extended to the examination and evaluation of contemporary Chinese painting by western centrism. But also, because in the perspective of postcolonial narrative autonomy, identity and discourse power, contemporary Chinese artists and their paintings are further placed in marginalized and conceptualized cultural positions by this aesthetic model (Liu & Zheng, 2023). Therefore, when contemporary Chinese artists draw on or interpret the essence of traditional Chinese art under the Tahitian aesthetic model, it is more difficult to truly express their local aesthetic value. On the contrary, it is easier for them to fall into the aesthetic expectations of postcolonial ideas for the stereotyped "Chinese contemporary impression" and promote the influence of self-colonization phenomenon in this painting expression form.

Finally, in the creation process of contemporary Chinese painting, the Tahitian aesthetic model, as the mutual influence product of eastern and western cultures, not only provides thinking and inspiration to contemporary Chinese artists, but also offers new ways of intervention for postcolonial ideas. In this intervention approach, contemporary Chinese artists gradually lose their cultural identity and incorporate themselves into the dynamic process of self-colonization in their creative practice of borrowing from western classic painting works (Sandhu & Higgins, 2016). The self-colonization phenomenon caused by this is a new artistic synthesis that combines the contemporary Chinese aesthetic system with the existing western postcolonial factors. It often consists of the internal operation of the western aesthetic value evaluation system, the artworks that obscure postcolonial concepts with a gorgeous appearance, the self-imitation strategy of Chinese contemporary artists, and the promoters and communicators of self-colonization. These four constituent elements not only present the specific manifestations of postcolonial concepts, but also have a profound negative impact on contemporary Chinese artists and their paintings in the form of an addition to western aesthetic ideas in the contemporary aesthetic context.

The Internal Operation of Western Aesthetic Value Evaluation System

The western value evaluation system under the Tahitian aesthetic model is an important factor that weakens and restricts the independent development of contemporary Chinese painting, and is also the main postcolonial narrative lineage that guides its artistic practice and theoretical research.

In the heterogeneous aesthetic system that appears completely free but loses discourse space and cultural identity, it is difficult for differentiated and marginalized contemporary Chinese painting to complete the entire evolution process of extending and redeveloping local spiritual connotations. Faced with the lack of independent discourse power and low recognition in the aesthetic value system, Chinese contemporary artists have to create their paintings in a way that understands the western value evaluation system. Meanwhile, the postcolonial concept behind the Tahitian aesthetic model designates a coherent and integrated aesthetic narrative theme for the relevant artist group, then promoting them to

"voluntarily" change and adjust the creative direction of contemporary Chinese painting. By obtaining disguised recognition under the Tahitian aesthetic model through fragile cultural connections, these artists could only meet their urgent need for a enriched spiritual world of themselves on surface (Kobayashi et al., 2019).

Taking Zhang Xiaogang, a Chinese art star, as an example. He has stepped onto the international art stage as a new generation contemporary artist in the western value evaluation system. Although his artworks do not lack independent and innovative thinking, the cultural space for examining his own cultural identity and expressing contemporary artistic concepts in the works is extremely narrow. He uses the unified measurement standards of the Tahitian aesthetic model, such as cognitive structure, propaganda mode and the other recognition, as the main axis of creation practice to promote the interpretation and exposition of postcolonial ideas on the subject of contemporary Chinese painting.

Taking his artworks "The Performer" (Figure 3) and "The Black Sofa" (Figure 4) as examples, in his long-term dependence on the western value evaluation system, Zhang Xiaogang's reference perspective on contemporary painting language leans towards western perspective of examining and evaluating the ecological landscape of Chinese contemporary aesthetics. Based on it, he would use a self-perceived reasonable way to vent the unease and oppression caused by the suspension of self-discourse power, and erase the original local aesthetic concepts of Chinese contemporary painting. But this approach not only marginalizes his own cultural position, but also further intensifies the subjective feeling elaboration and paradox relationship of illegitimate logic under western cultural domination thinking (Pan, 2021).



Figure 3: Zhang Xiaogang, The Performer, (2016), Oil on Canvas, 120cm x 150cm.



Figure 4: Zhang Xiaogang, *The Black Sofa*, (2016), Oil on Canvas, 120cm x 150cm.

Although these two paintings are not closely related to the actual traditional Chinese art elements in the contemporary cultural context, they are actually regarded as a successful attempt to contemporary Chinese local art in the western value evaluation system. Because in the opinion of Tahitian aesthetic model, the overall character image of these artworks is not only a true and profound feedback and evaluation of Chinese existing cultural system, but also a necessary way for Chinese local aesthetic concepts to enter the global mainstream artistic vision and aesthetic system. Therefore, in the discourse power orientation of western aesthetic value evaluation system, Chinese local aesthetic concepts in the current cultural context are not extended and inherited by Zhang Xiaogang's works, but would be led to the current situation of diverse self-colonization (Gong, 2016).

As a result, western value evaluation system of the Tahitian aesthetic model completely suppresses contemporary Chinese painting, then causes it to lose its independent critical ability and original guiding principles. Contemporary Chinese artists are also difficult to showcase the local aesthetic concepts and traditional artistic elements that are the core elements of contemporary Chinese painting. Instead, they would promote the development process of this painting expression form in a very standardized and tortuous way.

The Artworks that obscure Postcolonial Concepts with a Gorgeous Appearance

In the Tahitian aesthetic model, diverse and gorgeous contemporary art language is often used as a cultural symbol to conceal the double standards between western cultural subjects and Chinese cultural others in postcolonial concepts, then constantly extend the aesthetic opposition between "civilization" and "primitive", as well as "centralization" and "marginalization".

Under this type of characteristic, contemporary Chinese painting takes eastern aesthetic image with stereotypical biases from a postcolonial perspective as the core element, in order to extend the "inherent cultural divide" between western centrism and eastern marginalization aesthetic values. Contemporary Chinese artists also use fragmented and mixed expressions to connect the "exotic" eastern cultural images with western contemporary aesthetic forms. Then they would separate the outer visual language and inner spiritual meanings of their artworks through linear deduction, mark the existence way, examination perspective and discussion trend of the marginalization of Chinese

contemporary painting through the mixed form of eastern and western aesthetics (Huang & Wang, 2022).

Taking Wang Guangyi, the founder of the contemporary art group in northern China, as an example, he often combines the visual image of the Chinese cultural revolution with western contemporary advertising propaganda artworks to create a series of contemporary paintings with the Tahitian aesthetic model. In his series of works "Great Criticism" (Figure 5 and Figure 6), Wang Guangyi combines the American pop aesthetic style with the aesthetic characteristics of past Chinese political propaganda paintings. Then he utilizes modern Chinese propaganda artistic form to combine the extremely distinctive western contemporary aesthetic symbols with the "eastern art image" from the perspective of postcolonial concepts, in order to form a highly provocative cultural graphic representation. These works often use characters from the period of the Chinese cultural revolution with similar movements as the visual language subject, combine their prominent symbols with western consumerism signs in a rigid way, and highlight the incompatible combination of text and image with a pure color background.



Figure 5: Wang Guangyi, Great Criticism: Chanel, (2001), Oil on Canvas, 300 x 400 x 2.5cm.



Figure 6 : Wang Guangyi, Great Criticism: Dior, (2000), Oil on Canvas, 2000 x 300 cm.

At the same time, Wang Guangyi mixes Chinese art elements on the basis of western contemporary formal aesthetics, then attempt to gain a common aesthetic sensory recognition between the East and the West through the merging of Chinese and western painting. But this expression way deconstructs, splices and re-constructs contemporary Chinese aesthetic illustrations with an eastern fixed visual style, then explains and interprets the standard postcolonial aesthetic examples through the rigid integration of Chinese and

western culture systems (Suspitsyna & Shalka, 2019). These examples not only promote artists to self-deprecate and simplify the unique charm and sacredness of Chinese local painting, but also weaken and change its original cultural significance through self-criticism towards the solidified and stagnant eastern cultural images. Through the surface contents of these artworks, relevant artists introduce a postcolonial discourse attitude and a "classic Chinese image" into the self-aesthetic expression through "independent" aesthetic biases and subjective identification. It not only further confirms the inherent prejudice rationality of the "Chinese impression" under postcolonial ideas, but also provides a referable and critical artistic framework for the Tahitian aesthetic model in Chinese current cultural context.

As a result, Chinese contemporary artists who create according to the Tahitian aesthetic model transplant western contemporary formal aesthetics and the "Orientalized" superficial visual exposition into their artworks. They also conceal the inherent semantics of Chinese original artistic elements through distinct postcolonial art language, then depict and shape contemporary Chinese aesthetic illustrations with self-colonial characteristics according to the inherent reference and review of western ideology towards eastern cultural images.

The Self-imitation Strategy of Chinese Contemporary Artists

Self-imitation strategy is a common cultural strategy of the Tahitian aesthetic model, which is aimed at expanding the self-colonization concept in contemporary Chinese painting. In the creation of contemporary Chinese painting, relevant artists incorporate the Tahitian aesthetic model into their own works through imitation, then establish a confusing and mixed cultural relationship between western subjective imagination and postcolonial contemporary aesthetic practice. This cultural relationship is based on Homi Bhabha's "unconscious hybridization" theory, which expresses self-deception and self-negation. Although retaining the artist's main creative identity in the aesthetic framework of Chinese contemporary painting, it deprives and criticizes its possibility of secondary creation and independent modern transformation.

In the Tahitian aesthetic model, contemporary Chinese artists often imitate western classic artwork illustrations for believing they can change the current development situation. Based on it, they would add subjective perceptual expression with personalization, then integrate the traditional eastern aesthetic heritage into western contemporary formal aesthetics, in order to fill the "natural incompleteness" of their eastern cultural identity. When deconstructing and re-constructing contemporary artistic language, based on the "natural culture differences" between the East and the West, related artists would use an anxious and tense visual atmosphere to explain the spiritual structure dominated by postcolonial ideas. So, in these Chinese artists would depict stereotypical and distorted eastern art images from a western centrism perspective, and transplant Homi Bhabha's "black skin and white mask" concept into the aesthetic illustrations of contemporary paintings. This aesthetic illustrations in imitation behavior with self-dwarfing nature not only indirectly verify the "rationality" of postcolonial creative standards and identity misalignment, but also further exacerbate the self-colonization degree in contemporary Chinese painting (Cho, 2021).

Famous contemporary Chinese artist Yue Minjun often refers to classic western paintings in his works, using contemporary Chinese visual language to explain the "inherent gap" in the

cultural status between the West and the East under the Tahitian aesthetic model, then self-satirizes his "humble" creation subject identity.

In his artworks "Hello, Manet" (Figure 7) and "I and Picasso" (Figure 8), Yue Minjun directly utilizes the expressive power of cultural imitation strategies under the Tahitian aesthetic model. He not only applies the laughing eastern faces to the aesthetic composition of Manet's and Picasso's classic works, but the self-deprecating character dynamics are also depicted as low-level and non-mainstream cultural images, rather than simply borrowing and imitating. By these two paintings, Yue Minjun vividly illustrates the cultural identity self-contradiction and self-doubt of the contemporary Chinese aesthetic creation by portraying the character images of the laughing persons as the easily recognizable eastern identities in the West. He also provides more positive feedback that his main identity as Oriental artists is assimilated by the post-colonial concept (Yu, 2010). Therefore, by expressing the illusion of fragmented value balance without local artistic spiritual connotation and regarding visual perception imitation from western classic artworks, Yue Minjun expounds the self-mockery of the existing cultural position and postcolonial aesthetic value of Chinese contemporary painting.



Figure 7: Yue Minjun, Hello, Manet, (2001), Wooden Print, 77 x 55cm.



Figure 8: Yue Minjun, I and Picasso, (2022), Oil on Canvas, 300 x 740 cm.

As a result, contemporary Chinese artists are able to construct the external visual image of Chinese contemporary painting by imitating western classic artworks. But under the influence of the Tahitian aesthetic model, they not only fail to draw on the core essence of western paintings, but also gradually adapt to and promote the shaping of the postcolonial "contemporary Chinese impression", then further create and intensify the existing fragmented cultural differences between the East and the West.

The Promoters and Communicators of Self-colonization

In the Tahitian aesthetic model, contemporary Chinese artists are not only creators of postcolonial contemporary paintings, but also the promoters and communicators of self-colonization phenomenon. In this aesthetic model, relevant artists are unwilling to explore and elaborate on the originality of contemporary creative concepts and the multicultural interactivity of Chinese local aesthetics. Instead, they treat the symbolic traditional Chinese art elements with postcolonial concept as open and mixed contemporary aesthetic themes.

Meanwhile, in this type of contemporary artworks, Chinese artists replace the sacred and mysterious essence of eastern art with a creation way that is disconnected from the local aesthetics essence and traditional visual expression. They not only examine visual language with a divisive essence from the perspective of postcolonial ideas, but also describe it as an aesthetic vision that integrates and transcends contemporary cultural backgrounds of both the East and the West. Based on it, Chinese contemporary artists express their contradictory cognitive thinking and behavioral logic through the homeless narrative subject and the unstable contemporary form in the Tahitian aesthetic model. Then they would define and describe the overall Chinese contemporary cultural image from a passive perspective through the pedantic and rigid external representation (Said, 2023).

Taking Fang Lijun, the authoritative leader of contemporary Chinese painting, as an example, he utilizes critical thinking of surface visual language under the Tahitian aesthetic model to promote the development of contemporary painting. Through treating his cultural identity as the main subject of contemporary art creation, he also creates cultural appendages with self-colonization characteristics by using the form beauty and expression techniques of western contemporary painting. Although he does not completely copy the creative mode of contemporary western painting, he conceives his examination and criticism of contemporary Chinese aesthetic image through the eastern traditional cultural images under post-colonial transformation.

In his work "Baoyi Idle Transmission" (Figure 9), Fang Lijun portrays Yuan Longping, a scientist who had solved Chinese decades long hunger problem and was widely loved by the Chinese people, as a distorted and ugly eastern stereotype with long Qing Dynasty braids in the art form of traditional Chinese ink on paper. Although Fang Lijun attempts to use the free creation of contemporary art language as a gimmick to connect superficial thematic content and cultural identity that is not based on local aesthetic values in Chinese local art expression form, so as to define the "Chinese contemporary image" that can be understood and accepted by the existing Chinese art circle. However, he not only interprets the self-colonial image of Chinese contemporary culture with local aesthetic expression, but examines and judges the identity value in Chinese contemporary artistic level with the mental state of self-abandonment (Yang, 2011). Finally, this artwork subtly transforms the original local spiritual connotations into the "contemporary Chinese cultural landscape" under the Tahitian aesthetic model, then extends the self-dwarfing complex to the existing subordination and cultural dislocation of postcolonial concepts through subtle expressions.



Figure 9: Fang Lijun, *Baoyi Idle Transmission*, (2015), Ink on Paper, 43cm x 37cm.

Therefore, in the Tahitian aesthetic model, contemporary Chinese artists would adopt cognitive concepts that originally belonged to traditional art, then promote the aesthetic evaluation and value criticism towards local Chinese contemporary art concepts in the current context of postcolonial ideology as a low-profile communicator. They also describe the cultural survival status of contemporary Chinese painting as a typical "Chinese impression" from the perspective of postcolonial ideas through cultural images with strange and nihilistic elements (Gauglee & Titton, 2019).

Contradictions and Limitations

In this study, the Tahitian aesthetic model is still relatively blank in the current academic background. This is not only because this aesthetic model, as a term that affects the current cultural context, lacks an inherent connection with past postcolonial academic achievements, but also because relying on the discourse perspective and thinking mode of western centrism in existing academic achievements, it is difficult for researchers to interpret the actual impact of related self-colonial phenomena on Chinese contemporary aesthetic environment. Therefore, the research results have not yet fully explored the actual influence of this aesthetic model on contemporary Chinese painting from the perspective of its independent development progress.

At the same time, the Tahitian aesthetic model is belonging to postcolonial ideas, which is also based on western centrism and covers the entire non-western art system. Therefore, the Tahitian aesthetic model is also affect-able to other diverse painting types. However, in this study, researchers only demonstrate the influence of the Tahitian aesthetic model on contemporary Chinese painting, but does not prove that the relevant research results and impact effects are also applicable to the actual development status and cultural significance of other non-western painting forms, nor does it mean these different aesthetic styles are affected to the same degree and scope by the Tahitian aesthetic model.

Conclusion

This study argues that the Tahitian aesthetic model places contemporary Chinese painting at the contradictory focus of the contemporary development of local art. In related creative practices, the postcolonial concept behind this aesthetic model introduces mixed and conflicting cognitive thinking into this painting expression form, thereby defining and judging

the visual language, spiritual connotation and even existence significance of related contemporary artworks.

At the same time, the Tahitian aesthetic model respectively utilizes the western aesthetic evaluation system, chaotic and gorgeous visual representations, self-imitation from the perspective of the Oriental others, and the promotion and dissemination of heterogeneous Chinese cultural landscapes, further expand and extend the self-colonization phenomenon of contemporary Chinese painting, then intensify the cultural status quo of differentiation and marginalization in this painting expression form.

In addition, contemporary Chinese artists are willing to reveal the core content of contemporary painting through intuitive and concise expression techniques, but they also erase the inherent sacredness and mystery of eastern local aesthetics in the process of imitation and adaptation. Instead, they use the Tahitian aesthetic model to depict the contemporary Chinese art language, achieve a "new mixed artistic representation" of eastern and western cultures through self-interpretation and self-hypnosis in the creative process. However, in the view of researchers, even if this type of artist group creates contemporary paintings in a self-colonial manner under the Tahitian aesthetic model, the related artworks and creative behaviors can still represent the Chinese contemporary aesthetic image in the current cultural context. They could also reverse influence the understanding, judgment, and criticizing of self-colonial "Chinese contemporary impression" caused by postcolonial concept and western centrism.

Therefore, even under the influence of the Tahitian aesthetic model, relevant artists should still have a responsible attitude to re-understand and judge the cognitive thinking, behavioral logic, and cultural significance of aesthetics creation of contemporary Chinese painting.

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