

# One Conception, Two Worlds

## A Comparative Study of Styles of Claude Monet and Huang Binhong

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**Abstract**—Impressionists emphasize thin but visible brush strokes, open composition, accurate depiction of light in its changing qualities and ordinary subject matter. Despite differences in cultural and artistic tradition, an in-depth comparison of Monet's (1840-1926) "Water Lilies" and Huang Binhong's (1865-1955) "Mountains and Rivers" shed light on the crucial elements of perception and experience as well as unusual visual angles that both artists embraced in their paintings.

**Keywords**—Impressionists; formatting; style; styling; inser

### I. INTRODUCTION

Most impressionists shared the general view that all life contained a vision of beauty. Villages, gardens, bedrooms and theatres all expressed a joy of life, a wholeness and a radiance. The aim of Impressionism was to paint a specific object at a specific moment, to capture the effect of light and color at an instant in time. In fact, the impressionist painting was to make the finished canvas similar to a picture full of colors. Its characteristics include thin but visible brush strokes, open composition, emphasis on accurate depiction of light in its changing qualities, and ordinary subject matter. As the influence of Impression spread beyond France, numerous of Chinese painters at the turn of the twentieth century became identified as practitioners of the new style. Some of the most important examples are Huang Binhong (黄宾虹 1865-1955) and Li Keran (李可染 1907-1989). Both Huang and Li claimed that the Impressionist paintings were the source of inspiration of and the newly added dimension to their traditional Chinese black brush-stroke paintings. Despite differences in culture and artistic tradition, an in-depth investigation of French and Chinese Impressionists will certainly shed light on the crucial elements of perception and experience as well as unusual visual angles that the artists embraced in their paintings. This essay is to use Monet's (1840-1926) "Water Lilies" and Huang Binhong's "Mountains and Rivers" as two examples to illustrate the similarities and differences of Impressionism in two different worlds.

### II. A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF STYLES OF CLAUDE MONET AND HUANG BINHONG

One important feature for Impressionism is to capture the essence of the subject, rather than its details. The painters used short "broken" brush strokes of mixed color to create a vibrant surface. They emphatically would like to portray momentary effects of sunlight by painting outdoors. We also note that Impressionists paintings often produce softer edges and intermingling of color by placing wet paint into wet paint without waiting for successive applications to dry. The optical mixing of colors occurs in the eye of the viewer. Painters throughout history in the West and East had occasionally used these methods, but impressionists were the first to use them all together, and with such consistency.

Beginning in the 1880s and 1890s through the end of his life in 1926, Monet worked on "series" paintings. A subject Monet painted is to produce the effects in varying light and weather conditions. Fifteen of the paintings were exhibited at the Galerie Durand-Ruel in 1891. He later produced several series of paintings including the "Water Lilies." In the first "Water Lilies" painting "Fig. 1", Monet produced the effects of light outdoors when the sun rose in the morning. We found short, thick strokes of paint to capture the lilies and their thin reflections on the pond. Colors are applied side-by-side with as little mixing as possible. In paintings made outdoors, shadows are painted with the light green and blue of the sky as it is reflected onto surfaces of water, giving a sense of freshness previously not represented in painting.



Fig. 1. The first "Water Lilies" painting.

In the second "Water Lilies" painting "Fig. 2", Monet worked in the evening to produce the shadowy effects of evening effects or twilight. We note that Monet does not use the transparency of thin paint films, or glazes. Like most Impressionist paintings, the surface is typically opaque. The play of natural light is emphasized. Close attention is paid to the reflection of colors from object to object on the pond. Monet was fond of placing wet paint upon wet paint technique, achieving an effect of color vibration. Green grays and blues are produced by mixing complementary colors, thus capturing the essence of lilies and leaves on the rim of the canvass, while leaving in the middle of water surface for the reflection of the dark blue sky.

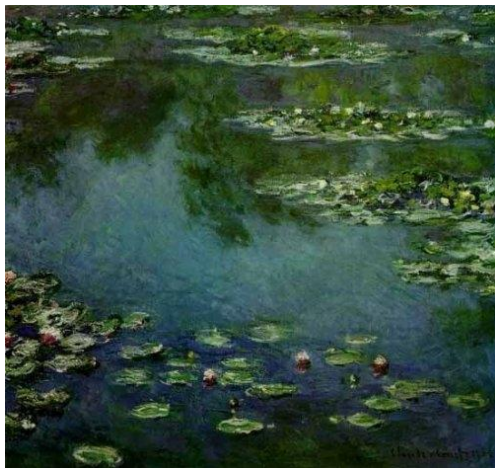


Fig. 2. The second "Water Lilies" painting.

Impressionism was in many ways the essence of realism because its aim was to paint a specific object at a specific moment, to capture the effect of light and color at an instant in time. The third "Water Lilies" painting "Fig. 3" is the case in point in fact. Monet concerned with how local vision or perception has a halo, a haze of red color surrounding it; for example, when seen in the eye, blue might have a red halo or green a purple one, depending on the light and the colors surrounding it. Color is "mixed in the eye".

In fact, impressionist paintings are composed of discreet points of color, but as the viewer stands further back the eye fills in the gaps and mixes the colors to create a total image. The eyes sees Monet's "red lilies" painting, for example, as

if one stood in his large garden at Giverny, but looking closely there would be constellations of reds and yellows making up this impression. The visual effects are similar to the impression evoked naturally by a poet in Tang Dynasty in his lines: "The endless greenness of lotus' leaves stretch far and away; the redness of lotus flowers is aglow from exposure to the sun."



Fig. 3. The third "Water Lilies" painting.

By the same token, Huang Binhong's flower and bird paintings adopted Impressionist credos: all life contained a vision of beauty: flowers, birds, mountains, rivers, tress, waterfalls, and shacks and temples all expressed a joy of life, a wholeness and a radiance. In Huang's painting "Flowers and Grasshopper" "Fig. 4", we note that he exploits short, thick and broken strokes of paint to capture the essence of subject, rather than its details. Huang also uses many layers of wet paint without waiting for successive applications to dry, thus producing intermingling of color for flowers and grasshopper on canvas. Colors are applied side-by-side with as little mixing as possible, creating a vibrant surface.



Fig. 4. Huang's painting "Flowers and Grasshopper".

Pure impressionism avoids the use of black paint. Grays and dark tones are produced by mixing complementary colors. However, Huang attempted to adopt black paint to portray a series of "Mountain Huang" (黄山题材系列) paintings. Just like Monet, Huang liked to capture the momentary and transient effects of sunlight by painting outdoors (en plein air). He portrayed overall visual effects, instead of details, and used short broken brush strokes of mixed color to achieve an effect of intense dark color vibration. In fact, the technique Huang used is called "Cun fa" (皴法), the method of showing the shades and texture of rocks and mountains by light ink strokes in traditional Chinese landscape painting. In the following I will use "Mountains and Rivers" (黄山汤口图) (Fig. 5) as an example to illustrate how he developed new techniques specific to the style of Impressionism.

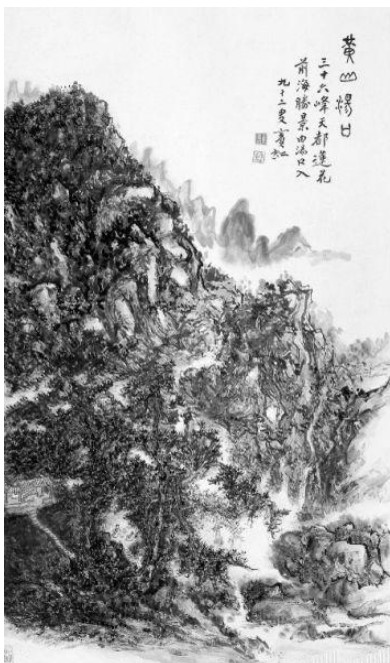


Fig. 5. "Mountains and Rivers".

In his lifetime, Huang climbed Mount. Huang nine times and often stopped at some point to observe the formation of rocks, clouds and mists in the mountains, twining plants, small streams and rivulets, and winding paths. "Mountains and Rivers" was praised by most Chinese painting scholars as one of his masterworks. Encompassing what they argued was a different way of seeing, it is an art of immediacy and movement, of candid poses and compositions, of the play of light expressed in varied use of dark tones. His liberal use of black as a color is viewed as the acme of Chinese artistic tradition. For him, there are seven types of dark color: thick dark, light dark, broken dark, stained dark, stroke dark, pitch dark, and frozen dark. The ways Huang sees the mountains or hills varied: from the side, a whole range; from the end, a simple peak. Far, near, high, low, no two points alike. His paintings not only represent Impressionist practices but also reveal the blending of Ying-Yang views of Chinese philosophy. Smooth or shaded blending of dark tones created the model of workmanship.

Huang is seen as a painter who has stood astraddle between tradition and modernity. He emphasized common subjects, such as birds and flowers, but their methods of composition were traditional. He arranged his compositions so that the main subject commanded the viewer's attention. But Huang also relaxed the boundary between subject and background, like "Mountains and Rivers," so that the effect of painting often resembles a snapshot, a part of a larger reality captured as if by chance. Huang also pursued other means of artistic expression by developing into an art from its very subjectivity in the conception of the image. We note that Huang used the technique of wet paint is placed into wet paint when he portrayed the mountains and rocks without waiting for successive applications to dry. It produces softer edges and intermingling of dark tones. Black colors are applied side-by-side with as little mixing as possible, creating a vibrant surface and leaving an expanse of empty space on canvas. The optical mixing of dark colors occurs in the eye of the viewer. Huang's paintings, to some extent, are an epitome of Chinese vision of the universe. Many artists strove to form an unity of heaven and earth, mountains and rivers, light and darkness, and completeness and emptiness.

### III. CONCLUSION

Both Western and Chinese Impressionist painters seek to express their perceptions of nature rather than create exact representations. This allowed artist to depict subjectivity what they saw with their tacit imperatives of taste and conscience. Granted differences of techniques, content and composition, both painters enhance our awareness of universal values and cultural tradition. A comparative study of paintings by Monet and Huang Binhong's open up an avenue which leads us to another heights of aesthetic values. Works of momentary action and fleeting lights of a landscape or the day-to-day lives of people are eternal and will remain forever and later become a pleasant part of our memory.

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