

Tracing of Ink and Brush: the challenge of Chinese Literati Paintings based on the case of Li Chi-mao (1925-2019)

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As the famous literati artist Su Dongpo said that ‘paintings which emphasize the likeness of form can only be compared to children’s works.’ Since likeness is not the ultimate goal of Chinese paintings, ink and brush are not only the technique and grammar to imitate the real world but also reflect some figurative expression. Therefore, literati painters created some brushstrokes in landscapes to convey different kinds of textures from nature through their mind. In addition, the specific strokes gradually become an identical lineage among the circles of Chinese literati painters.

But this specifically Chinese approach to art encountered a challenge when East met West in the twentieth century. Chen Si-zeng (1876-1923) has pointed out the common characteristic of Western modern Art and Chinese literati painting, that is subjective expression, in his book titled *The Value of Literati Painting (1922)*. However, the tools of painting from East and West are totally different, I will discuss how modern literati painters, such as Li Chi-mao, using ink and brush to rethink the tracing of literati painting and to reflect the challenge of literati painting.

Li Chi-mao, born in China and immigrated to Taiwan after 1949, was a prolific and diverse painter. His style of painting evoked each life stage he experienced. It is worthy to mention that his life witnessed the fate of modern literati painting. Therefore, this essay will analyze his ink and brush paintings in three stages below:

First, brushstroke as standard vocabulary: his early time in school (before 1960s).

Secondly, brushstroke as propaganda: his political painting during the Cold War Era.

Thirdly, brushstroke as ideal: his new way between calligraphy and painting (after 1980s).