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# A Comparative Analysis of the Retro Tendency Between the Periods of the European Renaissance and the Fine Art of the Ming Dynasty

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## Abstract

Tracing back to the past means better exploration forward, and retro has an indispensable significance in history. The art of the European Renaissance and the Ming Dynasty in China showed corresponding retro tendencies in two different geographic areas in the same period. Their respective retro tendencies have different mechanisms and manifestations. This article attempts to compare the retro tendencies between the European Renaissance and the Ming Dynasty art from three aspects: the essence, the methods, and the retro characteristics.

## Key Words

Renaissance period, Ming Dynasty, fine art, retro tendency

## Introduction

There was a huge social transformation from the fourteenth century to the sixteenth century in Europe after the theological dominance of the medieval period. The development of the emerging bourgeoisie led to a revival in literature, art, and other fields in Europe. During this period, the retro trend of European Renaissance fine art had its characteristics, and Ming Dynasty fine art also exhibited a certain retro tendency, which was different from the revivalism of the fine art of the Yuan and Qing dynasties. Therefore, it is necessary to compare the retro tendencies of fine art during the European Renaissance and Ming Dynasty.

## 1. Vintage Essentialism: Human Freedom and Respect for Orthodoxy

The fine art of the European Renaissance depicted a very prosperous time. Compared with medieval fine art, non-religious themes were plentiful during the Renaissance, as they seemed to depict a completely new world. "The essence of the Renaissance lies in its origin of Humanism."<sup>1</sup> Human beings seem to have become a new theme, active in the works of European Renaissance artists. We agree with American scholar Sandra Sider who said: "The obvious example of 'revival' is the rediscovery of the classical Roman past in Europe."<sup>2</sup> We believe that the concept of revival has a richer meaning than retro, as it does not only represent the rediscovery of ancient Rome, but also has the significance of building a new world. Retro has a more specific meaning than revival, which approaches the past and gains new knowledge

through learning from the past.

On the one hand, the fine art of the Renaissance in Europe played a part in the construction of the emerging bourgeoisie. It replaced deified nature with humanized nature on the historical stage, serving the bourgeoisie. On the other hand, art was long imprisoned in the medieval ages and urgently needed to express human themes through visual effects. For example, Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* and Raffaello's *School of Athens* are performances and creations with human elements. The acquisition of artistic freedom is first guaranteed by human freedom. It is not difficult to find that during the Renaissance period, artists' imitation of ancient architecture, sculpture, and other works essentially reconfirmed the central position of humans in the universe by imitating those works. Vasari once said that Raffaello was almost obsessed with ancient architecture, but for Raffaello being influenced by perspective in technology was not the reason for his true obsession with ancient art. He utilized the law of perspective to demonstrate the decisive power of humans over nature and gods and used a single-point perspective to appropriately arrange humans and mythological characters in the picture, highlighting humans' omnipotence. Undoubtedly, humanity became the central issue of Raffaello's painting. Compared to the medieval ages, Renaissance artists had a wider selection of themes and were unsatisfied with describing and reproducing themes related to theocracy.

Albrecht Dürer believed that "beauty is the appropriate measure," which happens to be a true portrayal of Renaissance art: strict adherence to proportions, and transitioning to the artist's ideal measurement, makes the picture harmonious and appropriate. This shows that artists in the Renaissance fully understood the freedom of Roman art, and the driving force behind it was human liberation and human freedom. As Ekbert Faas said in his book *The Genealogy of Aesthetics*: "By 1507, Dürer had abandoned his previous attempt to conform the human body to geometric patterns, and henceforth attempted to deduce his ideal measurements, either directly from nature or classic patterns such as *The Apollo Observatory* or *The Venus of the Medici*."<sup>3</sup> The aesthetic theory of medieval philosopher Aquinas "based on the perception of pure harmony" also praised this aesthetic law based on appropriateness and harmony. However, during the Renaissance, this aesthetic law had to be perceived by visible people, rather than being dominated by invisible gods. In other words, the Renaissance revolution in the medieval ages meant that the gods of religion gave way to people in the present and secular world. Applying

scientific methods such as anatomy and perspective also aimed to illustrate a human-centered worldview. To sum up, the fine art of the Renaissance imitated and publicized the ideas of artistic freedom in ancient Greece and Rome and combined with the new science during the Renaissance, liberating the imprisoned spirit to obtain human freedom.

During the same period, Ming Dynasty fine art sparked a wave of learning from the ancients. Zhejiang style painters such as Wu Wei and Dai Jin were the most outstanding performers. Unlike the Yuan Dynasty painting style, which inherited the painting style of Li Cheng and Guo Xi from the Northern Song Dynasty, Ming Dynasty painters attached great importance to imitating ancient styles and inheriting the school of court painting from the Song Dynasty. On the one hand, this trend was rooted in the clamping down effect of politics on culture in the early Ming Dynasty, which created the attachment and flattery of political power in their painting culture by early Ming Dynasty painters. On the other hand, in the early Ming Dynasty the painting industry had experienced the painting style of the Yuan Dynasty's escape from secular emotions and based it on personal emotions. The fine art world needed to develop a creative approach that attached the painting orthodoxy of the Yuan Dynasty to the lofty and clean ruling orthodoxy. Literati painting leader Zhao Mengfu was an example of the overall reclusive literati in the artistic creation of the Yuan Dynasty. They attempted to pull away from a direct connection with politics and were satisfied with expressing their emotions. However, for Ming Dynasty painters the imitation of Tang Dynasty and Song Dynasty painting manifested their strong orthodoxy. In the early Ming Dynasty, Wang Lü pointed out the tendency of people to imitate the ancient in his *The Painting of Huashan*. From a side view, the trend of imitating the ancient in the early Ming Dynasty was extremely strong. They not only imitated the ancient to obtain necessary technical training, but also included complex artistic concepts. Similarly, in the early Ming Dynasty, Song Lian criticized the antiquity of the social customs: "The world is declining day by day, and people's hearts are not immersed as ancient as before. They often indulge in the beauty of chariots, horses, scholars, and women, delight in the beauty of flowers, birds, insects, and fish, and travel in the seclusion of mountains, forests, water, and stones, and the ancient meaning is gradually declining."<sup>4</sup> In Song Lian's view, the "ancient meaning" cannot be abolished, and must be "followed by the classics" (the "classics" here can be used as the meaning of ancient classic models), which means that the acquisition of ancient meaning must be



Figure 1. Dai Jin. *Sangu Maolu*. Color on silk, 172.2×107cm. China, Ming dynasty. Palace Museum, Beijing, China.

rooted in the imitation of ancient classics.

There were numerous retro schools and complex tendencies throughout the Ming Dynasty, and retro was an important theme. In the early Ming Dynasty, the Zhejiang style studied the Song Dynasty school of court painting. The skills of carvings, boards, and knots presented a strict painting technique result. Although there are technical factors regarding the caution and prudence of Zhejiang style painting, there are also painting propositions based on its orthodox concepts. As He Liangjun of the Ming Dynasty mentioned, “There are also several styles for landscape painting: Jing Hao and Guan Tong’s as one style; Dong Yuan and Seng Juran as one style; Li Cheng and Fan Kuan as one style; and Li Tang as one style. These styles have both brushwork and charm, and later painters who can master these styles are the main line.”<sup>5</sup> The emphasis on “main line” is often reflected in the Zhejiang style of painters. According to Japanese scholar Suzuki Kei’s investigation, Dai Jin, the leader of the Zhejiang style, is an “Expert and profiteer” and extensively interacts with the literati. Therefore, Suzuki Kei believes that Dai Jin adopted the school of court painting and Li style and Guo style, and also incorporated various other techniques; it must also be acknowledged that Dai Jin’s painting was particularly influenced by the Southern Song dynasty school of court painting style. In the painting world of the Ming Dynasty, since Dong Qichang put forward the theory of the Northern and Southern Sects, the orthodox position of the Southern Song dynasty school of court painting had been established. We can see from Suzuki Kei’s reviews how Dai Jin explored orthodoxy as a professional and literati painter with a dual identity.

So, seeing an orthodoxy struggle in the Ming Dynasty painting world is not difficult. For Ming Dynasty painters, there were generally two paths to retro. One was the path of school of court painting, and the other path was the literati painting. There is also an intersection between these two paths; it is impossible to determine whether painters followed the path of school of court painting or literati painting. However, regarding the overall retro trend of the Ming Dynasty, most painters were influenced by the Tang Dynasty and Song Dynasty paintings and highly pursued realism. Therefore, before the period of Dong Qichang, Mo Shilong and others proposed the Southern and Northern Sects, and the painting of the Ming Dynasty still tended to the fashion of courtyard style painting and regarded the painting adhering to the royal aesthetic interest as orthodox.

After the mid-Ming Dynasty, although painters made breakthroughs in establishing their styles due to the influence of psychology, there were still significant traces

of retro in their works. In particular, the theory of Northern and Southern Sects advocated by Dong Qichang and Mo Shilong can be described as the declaration of orthodox painting style. In summary, although there were many styles of fine art in the Ming Dynasty, they undoubtedly emphasized the orthodox humanistic spirit and painting style, even though Zhu Tong’s “brushwork and form cannot be neglected” or Xu Wei’s statement of “the extreme situation is a good work” both emphasized the importance of the form of painting techniques, which was undoubtedly a metaphorical expression of the orthodoxy in the painting world at that time.

## 2. Retro Methodology: Scientific Pursuit of Antiquity and Rational Imitation of Antiquity

The fine art creation of the Renaissance was rooted in the rational creative thinking of the subject during that period. As mentioned above, the retro tendency of fine art in the Renaissance aimed to express humans’ resistance to medieval theocracy, attempting to establish a logical world and cosmology centered around humans. With the formal introduction of single point perspective in *On Painting* by Leon Battista Alberti, the creation of binary opposition in Renaissance art had been deepened: “A completely new concept of precision was introduced into the artist’s creative vocabulary due to Alberti’s works, as the composition of paintings is based on measurements and the accurate proportions of characters and buildings.”<sup>7</sup> Therefore, in learning art from ancient Greece and Rome, Renaissance artists had the opportunity for anatomy to intervene in painting creation due to their infinite worship of body structure. In other words, anatomy, art and science are no different. For example, Leonardo da Vinci’s famous drawing *Vitruvian Man* perfectly represents the contours and muscles of the human body. This is also rooted in da Vinci’s understanding of ancient Roman architecture; he highly appreciated Vitruvius, the ancient Roman architect, who described the theory of the human body from the perspective of architecture, and made an in-depth exposition of its theory. Da Vinci always regarded art as a rigorous science that can be demonstrated, which is an exploration of the laws and a transformation of the external form and internal spirit of ancient Greek and Roman art scientifically and rationally in the creative practice. Similarly, Raffaello’s classic painting *Christ Unraveled from the Cross* is considered a model of precise composition in painting. It is not difficult to see from the calm and serene image of the victim in the painting that perhaps Raffaello has already been to Rome and obtained the source of creation from ancient sculpture,

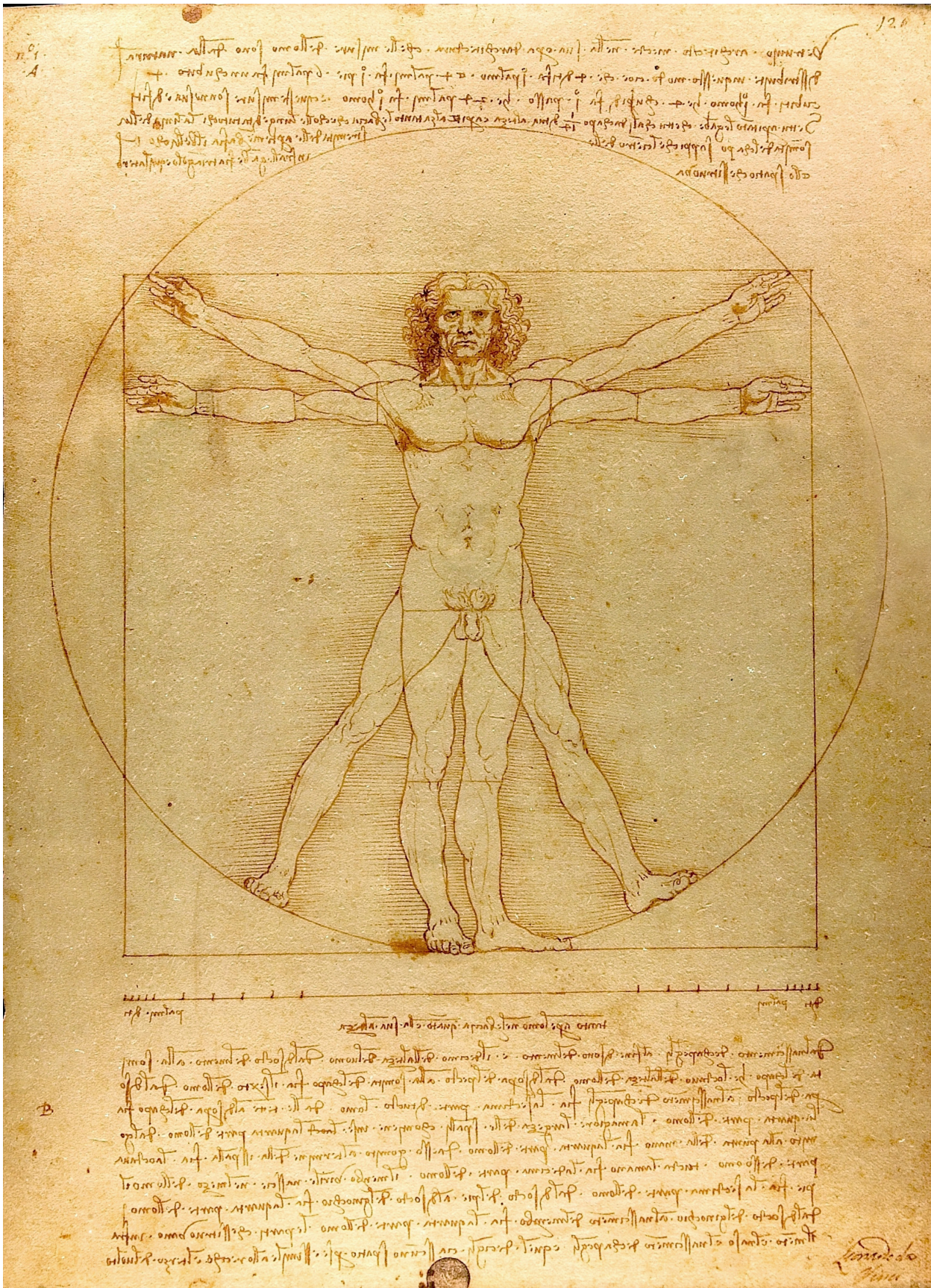


Figure 2. Leonardo da Vinci. *Vitruvian Man*. Metalpoint, pena and ink, and watercolor on paper, 34×24cm, C. 1490. Art Museum of the Venice Academy, Venice, Italy.



Figure 3. Lü Ji. *Mountain Birds amid Plums and Bamboos*. Color on silk, 183×97.8cm. China, Ming dynasty, Zhejiang Provincial Museum, Zhejiang, China.



Figure 4. Lin Liang. *Two Eagles*. Ink on silk, 129.4×75.9cm. China, Ming dynasty, Zhejiang Provincial Museum, Zhejiang, China.

which can be regarded as an excellent example of scientific retro.

The retro and imitating the ancient trend was particularly strong in the Ming Dynasty. On the one hand, this was a prominent manifestation of Chinese cultural tradition. On the other hand, Ming Dynasty fine art painters rebelled against the sluggish and casual atmosphere of literati painting in the Yuan Dynasty. Although understanding the method of obtaining ancient meaning can be seen in the paintings of Women school of painting artists such as Wen Zhengming and Shen Zhou, the Women school of painting still showed a significant tendency towards retro culture throughout the Ming Dynasty. As Zheng Wuchang said: “Make the group neat

and beautiful, to cater to the will of the superior, without violating the rules and regulations, and in case of great punishment”,<sup>8</sup> which means to cater to the wishes of the emperor and not hesitate to follow the neat and beautiful School of court painting. Succumbing to external pressure, to some extent, led some Ming Dynasty painters to give up expressing their emotions. This external creative approach further promotes the formation of the painter’s rational spirit. Therefore, rational creative methods were undoubtedly established and demonstrated in the retro fine art of the Ming Dynasty.

A characteristic of Chinese painting distinguishes it from Western painting is its freehand brushwork. The acquisition of meaning must be rooted in the co-

construction of subjects and objects, and it cannot be presented in a mind/object separation way. Although there have been successful practices by painters, such as the Women school of painting in the creation of mental objects, from the perspective of the majority of imitators among various styles of painters the rational imitation of the ancient and the trend of retro determined the main way of restoring ancient fine art in the Ming Dynasty. Yuan dynasty literati painting characterized by serving politics only sought resemblance and dissimilarity in form, and interest and artistic conception were not the primary considerations of painters. This is particularly prominent in the bird and flower paintings of Bian Jingzhao, Lin Liang and others. From the composition, theme, pen and ink and other aspects, it is impossible to get rid of the influence of the creation methods of the political bird and flower paintings in the Song Dynasty. For example, Lin Liang's painting *Two Eagles*, although it had pioneering achievements in the Ming Dynasty's freehand bird and flower painting, showed a high degree of precision in its brushstroke and structure, especially in the depiction of the two eagles, which was a subtle and realistic depiction that still retained the creative method of the Song Dynasty's bird and flower painting. In Lü Ji's *Mountain Birds amid Plums and Bamboos* the painting emphasizes both writing and craftsmanship, particularly catering to the aesthetic taste of the political with rich and exquisite craftsmanship. The red of camellias, the white of plum blossoms, and the liveliness of two birds in this painting all reflect the author's superb realistic ability. Wu Wei, Dai Jin and other Zhejiang style painters were also limited to the axe cutting and corner scenery of Ma, Xia, and others in the Southern Song Dynasty, and dared not go beyond it, just as Yu Jianhua commented on Wu Wei, "Only seeking pleasure, without any implicit meaning."<sup>9</sup> Implicitness is originally a symbol of the artistic concept in traditional Chinese painting. The retro emotion caused by political constraints on the outside and limited aesthetics on the inside cannot truly reach a profound artistic concept.

This group's rational retro creative approach had already existed widely in Tang Dynasty character paintings. Although it seems that Yan Liben's hand scroll *Portraits of the Emperors* in the Tang Dynasty is a masterpiece, its paintings cannot be as elegant as the figure paintings by Gu Kaizhi and Lu Tanwei in the Jin Dynasty in terms of the charm of the figures. However, the character images in Dunhuang murals during the Tang Dynasty present a more vibrant and dynamic nature. Undoubtedly, the rational way of imitating the ancient that dared not surpass the ancients is an important reason for the complete loss of charm. In

addition, although Chen Hongshou, a famous figure painter in the Ming Dynasty, had a certain sense of innovation in his figure paintings, the lines of his figure paintings are a bit more sophisticated and prudent than those of Ren Bonian. Therefore, the practice of literati painting by Xu Wei and others in the middle and late Ming Dynasty tried to break the subjective rational creation mode and became a symbol of creativity in the fine art history of the Ming Dynasty, which opened up the creative pattern of "I write my mind", paying more attention to the ancient people's "giving up form and taking meaning" and creating a new emerging giant represented by Xu Wei. Ming Dynasty artists often used a rational retro approach to extract ancient skills without obtaining the meaning of the ancient, deviating from the ancient Chinese emphasis on the artistic characteristics of "standing up the image by one's intention." This is inconsistent with European Renaissance fine art's scientific and rational retro approach. The former is the end of the spirit of Chinese painting, and the latter is the foundation of Western painting, which must be distinguished.

### **3. On the Characteristics of Revival: Borrowing from the Past to Create a New Era and Seeking the Past with the Past**

The fine art of the European Renaissance was revolutionary, reflected in the creative development of ancient Greek and Roman fine art. Therefore, its retro style is not conservative; Li Yucheng said: "The meaning of the term 'Renaissance' is not exact, as the prosperity of literature and fine art at that time had its innovations and was not a replica of ancient culture."<sup>10</sup> The trend of "borrowing from the past to create new" had become the most important feature of the Renaissance fine art retro trend. In a sense, the proportion principle of artists in the Renaissance towards *Vitruvian Man* and Pythagoras, and the theoretical application of the Platonic classification of sensory levels, are the most creative inventions of ancient Greek and Roman fine art by Renaissance artists. In the era of humanism, they did not blindly repeat the aesthetic standards established in the ancient. Still, in deeply comprehending the spiritual heritage of freedom left by ancient artists, with the humanistic norms and creative methods of the new era, a new trend specifically belonging to the Renaissance period was re-established. The sensitivity and understanding of human proportion and anatomy aimed to reinterpret some principles of post-Platonism's antisensationalism. In other words, the artists during the Renaissance explored the artistic truths of ancient Greece and Rome more scientifically and



Figure 5. Giotto Di Bondone. *Flight into Egypt*. Fresco, C. 1303-05. Scrovegni Chapel, Padua, Italy.

precisely. For example, for Giotto Di Bondone, one of the pioneers of the Renaissance, the characters are strong and sturdy in his painting *Flight into Egypt*, which replaced the soft and gloomy images of medieval characters. It must be said that the spirit of the characters in his paintings is attributed to the rich temperament of ancient Roman sculpture. Still, the spatial hierarchy of its visuals also indicates its differences from previous generations of painting works. For example, when Titian (Tiziano Vecellio) created *The Goddess* in 1516, he shaped it into

a beautiful female image that combines health, beauty, and intelligence, undoubtedly demonstrating Titian's artistic reconstruction after a profound understanding of the noble aesthetics of ancient Greece.

In the fine artworks of the Renaissance, secular scenes of human construction can be seen everywhere. Because of the comprehensive reflection of Renaissance artists on ancient Greek, Roman, and medieval fine art, their scientific and rational creative thinking activated positive human values and central positioning. Therefore,

artists in the Renaissance found the true value of ancient fine art, not by having an inferiority complex of today not being as good as the past, but by pursuing the truth beyond the classics to recreate the classics of the era.

In essence, the fine art of the European Renaissance was highly creative. For Renaissance artists, exploring and inheriting from ancient Greece and Rome was a reference to mathematical proportions, perspectives, and other aspects. Although the fine art of the Renaissance did not jump out of the vortex of scientific rationalism, this new humanistic painting concept was of great significance at that time. The creative significance of the new world of painting, initiated by the Three Masters of the Renaissance, is significantly greater than that of retro fine art. The Renaissance did not simply restore the brilliance of ancient painting, but created new classics in painting through resolute restoration of the past. The fine artworks of the Renaissance show that their painting realm and ideals are completely different from the fine art of ancient Greece and Rome. Their reference to perspective in ancient sculpture and architecture is only to better express new themes about humans. The meaning of borrowing from the past to create the new completely differs from the retro characteristics of Chinese Ming Dynasty fine art.

As early as the Tang Dynasty, Zhang Yanyuan's book, *Record of Famous Paintings of Successive Dynasties*, divided ancient, medieval, and modern paintings. In painting theory, painting dependent on ancient meaning has always been an important standard for painters and theorists of all ages to evaluate painting. The special system of painting academies that flourished during the Song Dynasty declined during the Yuan Dynasty. At the same time, their restoration in the Ming Dynasty changed the casual expression of Yuan Dynasty literati paintings, mainly manifested in the tracking of the old skills of the Song Dynasty. This kind of tracking is manifested as tracing artistic forms, rather than exploring the main content. As mentioned earlier, the fundamental reason for Ming Dynasty painting's seeking the past with the past was its adherence to the orthodox concept. This is first manifested as the constraint of centralized politics on painters. Yu Jianhua said, "Painting in the Ming Dynasty can be described as the inheritor of the Song and Yuan dynasties. In the early Ming Dynasty, the people in the painting academy mostly inherited painting skills from the Southern Song Dynasty. Some painters learned from Liu and Li and others from Ma and Xia. However, severe punishments were often imposed on the upper classes, and the painters often suffered strange disasters. Therefore, due to the unjust and oppressive influence, there was no room

for freedom to gallop in their thoughts. Only by adhering to the old rules and being cautious to avoid mistakes."<sup>11</sup> From this, it can be seen that "adhering to the old rules" and striving to avoid mistakes were the concentrated expressions of painters in the early Ming Dynasty. Specifically, in the creation of painting, there is the main characteristic of copying again and creating less: seeking the past with the past. Regarding the retro characteristics of Ming Dynasty painting, Xu Qin of the Ming Dynasty also mentioned in his book *Record of Ming Paintings*: "In recent times, experts were bad at painting, but some people said he disdained them. Many places in painting are dirty and vulgar, and there is no more impressive."<sup>12</sup> Although this is Xu Qin's exclamation about the Daoist and Buddhism paintings of the time, it is not difficult to see his criticism of the Ming Dynasty's paintings that "today is not as good as the past." For school of court painting style painters represented by the Zhejiang style, fear of political power and being deeply constrained are important factors in their restrained and rigid paintings. Zheng Wuchang's evaluation of Ming Dynasty painting is as follows: "So painters at that time, whether in the home or the palace, were very careful; everything they did and learned was deeply pondered, to cater to preferences of emperor."<sup>13</sup> It can be seen that as the representative of the Ming Dynasty literati painting system, the Wu style also failed to truly break away from the procedures of the Song and Yuan dynasties, and the artistic craftsmanship of the Song and Yuan dynasties was not fully reflected in the Wu style.

Yu Jianhua once made a detailed and comprehensive summary, citing over a hundred painters of the Ming Dynasty's retro style, and the number of people in the entire history of painting studies in the Ming Dynasty is limited to the sketching and freehand brushwork schools. For this reason, he had a very precise evaluation: "Although there were many natural styles in the Ming Dynasty, it was based on retro, and even if it was good, it could not be original."<sup>14</sup> Regarding the retro characteristics of the Wu style, Yu Jianhua also said, "Gu's paintings and Wu's paintings focus on copying and creating less, with a focus on beauty and lack of lofty. Showing the drawbacks, the paintings' meaning drops into a state of emptiness and can't escape."<sup>15</sup> This has summarized the Wu style, representing literati painting in the Ming Dynasty. Perhaps in his view, the lack of creative consciousness in copying can be a drawback.

This kind of criticism towards the Wu style may not be entirely factual. However, based on China's unique philosophical and historical perspective, Chinese paint

-ing was precisely advancing toward seeking the past with the past. The true evaluation of the good or bad in Chinese painting does not lie in the degree of retro effect or the depth of innovation. The reason why Yu Jianhua regards Wu style painting as the last in class is not only because Wu style painting only focuses on copying and lacks innovation—the real reason behind it is that the elements absorbed by the Wu style of painting in retro art are biased towards one point, a focus on beauty and lack of lofty, which leads to the drawback of the paintings' meaning which dropped into a state of emptiness and couldn't escape.

This is very similar to the performance of Zhejiang style painting in the early and middle Ming Dynasty. The gradual decline of the Zhejiang style in the late Ming Dynasty was precisely due to its rough and bold painting style, which people did not accept. Dong Qichang and others summarized that the Zhejiang style's skills of plate, carving, and knot were a drawback in the Zhejiang style's paintings; in fact, the Wu style and the Zhejiang style both focus on copying and rarely creating. So why is it that in evaluating later generations, the Zhejiang style tends to be sparse, while the Wu style tends to be rigid? To be fair, whether it is the Zhejiang style or the Wu style, their paintings are not without value or innovation; it's just that they hadn't fully inherited the excellent skills of the ancients, and even their inheritance from them was far from enough, showing the shortcomings in these two styles. In other words, people's criticism of the Zhejiang style and Wu style in the Ming Dynasty is not entirely due to their stubbornness, but rather, in terms of specific works, they did not express well the vivid charm of paintings in the Song and Yuan dynasties, nor did they reflect the artist's creative intentions. So fundamentally, neither the Wu style nor the Zhejiang style achieved the charm and atmosphere of paintings of the Song and Yuan dynasties. Hence, people attribute this result to the retro concept of Ming dynasty painters.

The Ming Dynasty painting world of seeking the past with the past "can only be considered a failure."<sup>16</sup> In fact, borrowing from the past to create a new era in China's fine art history is often an important criterion for judging the value of fine artworks, and non-creative copying is classified as a drawback of silence and decline generally. We believe that blindly imitating ancient times is not an end in itself. Compared to the Yuan Dynasty, although the retro feature of the Ming Dynasty's fine art points to the declining trend of seeking the past with the past, another fact can be seen from the historical trend of the entire fine art history: that there must be genuine innovation that breaks through the constraints of the times after a long silence or a great summary. In the middle and late

Ming Dynasty, Xu Wei pioneered the fine art of the Ming Dynasty with a strong sense of innovation. Through his efforts, there were also painters with a strong sense of innovation in the late Ming Dynasty, such as Bada Shanren (Zhu Da), Shi Tao and Hongren. It is difficult to say that their unique paintings have no connection with the overall conservative consciousness of the Ming Dynasty of seeking the past with the past. In summary, seeking the past with the past in Ming Dynasty fine art is a reflection of the times, and the individual will of painters was constrained for a considerable period of that time. Under the strong influence of political centralization, the "learn from mind, learn from vision and learn from nature" advocated by Wang Lü is not enough to become the mainstream of the times. Still, the retro trend of seeking the past with the past also accumulates strength for new fine art.

## Conclusions

The fine art of the European Renaissance and the Ming Dynasty exhibit different characteristics regarding retro tendencies, but they are also intertwined with very similar retro mechanisms. Whether it is the European Renaissance fine art based on retro innovation, or the Chinese Ming Dynasty fine art that follows the ancient tradition with the sage's words, they all play a long-term role in their respective cultural systems. Being conservative does not necessarily mean being backwards, nor does being innovative necessarily signify progress. The counter forces of the times are powerful, and exploring without boundaries and recklessly seeking novelty are bound to be accompanied by another decline in fine art. How to better build a harmonious relationship between human beings, humans and nature, humans and the universe, and how to better highlight human consciousness are the reflections of fine art retro to us.

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## ENDNOTES

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## 試比較歐洲文藝復興時期與明代美術的復古傾向

黃中

**摘要：**向過往追溯意味著更好地向前探索，“復古”在歷史進程中有著不可或缺的意義。在同一時間領域中的異域空間裡，歐洲文藝復興時期與中國明代的美術呈現出相應的復古傾向。但各自的復古傾向有著不同的發生機制和表現。本文試圖從復古的本質、復古的方式及復古的特徵三方面比較二者之間的復古傾向。

**關鍵詞：**文藝復興時期；明代；美術；復古傾向