

# Exploration of the Relationship between Form and Spirit in Chinese Freehand Figure Painting

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**Abstract:** This article explores the relationship between “form” and “spirit” in Chinese freehand figure painting, and analyzes their importance and interaction in artistic expression. By sorting out the traditional cultural background, the ideological connotation and artistic value carried by freehand figure painting are revealed in this paper, aiming to provide a new perspective for further research in this field.

**Keywords:** freehand figure painting; form; spirit; artistic expression; cultural connotation

## 1. Introduction

Chinese freehand figure painting, as an important component of traditional art, has a long history and profound cultural heritage. Since ancient times, this art form has not only focused on the depiction of characters, but also emphasized the transmission of inner spirit. With the relationship between “form” and “spirit” as the core, freehand figure painting showcases the emotions and personalities of figures through concise brushstrokes and exaggerated techniques. In this process, the subjective emotions of the painter are combined with the cultural background, making the work not only a presentation of visual art, but also an expression of thoughts and emotions. Therefore, in-depth research on the relationship between “form” and “spirit” in freehand figure painting can help understand its artistic value and cultural connotation, and provide new perspectives and inspirations for contemporary artistic creation.

## 2. Analysis of the concepts of “form” and “spirit”

### 2.1 Definition and characteristics of “form”

In Chinese freehand figure painting, “form” mainly refers to the external appearances and characteristic expressions of the characters. It not only includes basic shapes, proportions, and constructions, but also involves the depiction of details such as clothing, hairstyles, and postures. Freehand painting usually adopts concise and expressive lines, emphasizing the symbolism and generalization of “form”, and conveying emotions through exaggeration and transformation. For example, painters may enhance a character’s personalities through exaggerated body movements and facial expressions. This way of expression not only gives the work a strong visual impact, but also allows viewers to more directly feel the emotional state of the characters.

### 2.2 Definition and characteristics of “spirit”

In freehand figure painting, “spirit” refers to the mental personalities and emotional temperament contained in the figures, reflecting their spirituality and personality traits. It is not just a representation of facial expressions, but also a profound revelation of the character’s inner world. Painters convey the thoughts, emotions, and moral qualities of characters through the use of brush and ink, color matching, and composition arrangement. For example, light strokes can express agility and liveliness, while heavy hues may convey melancholy and contemplation. The expression of “spirit” often goes beyond concrete images, causing the work to resonate emotionally and inspire the viewers’ imagination and understanding of the characters’ stories.[1]

## 3. The interrelationship between “form” and “spirit” in Chinese freehand figure painting

### 3.1 Unity of “form” and “spirit”

In Chinese freehand figure painting, the unity of “form” and “spirit” is reflected in the harmonious relationship between the two. “Form” is an external manifestation, while “spirit” is the inner soul. The two complement each other and jointly

construct a complete figure image. A successful work often conveys profound emotions through vivid forms. For example, when artists depict characters through the fluidity of lines and the elegance of posture, these images are not only visual representations, but also projections of mental state. Every stroke and line in the painting tells a story and conveys emotions to the viewer. This unity allows viewers to not only feel the external image of the characters while appreciating the work, but also deeply understand their spiritual world, thus generating deeper resonance. In this way, the unity of “form” and “spirit” not only enhances the expression of the work, but also enhances the aesthetic experience of the viewer, enabling them to achieve spiritual resonance in artistic enjoyment.

### **3.2 The opposition between “form” and “spirit”**

Although there is unity between “form” and “spirit” in freehand figure painting, there is also a certain degree of opposition between the two. This opposition is mainly reflected in the artist’s expression techniques and the viewer’s interpretation process. The expression of “form” is often intuitive and concrete, and viewers can understand characters by observing their shapes, postures, and expressions. But the expression of “spirit” is more abstract, involving deep exploration of emotions, thoughts, and inner worlds. In some cases, the painter’s intention may be overly emphasized in the expression of “form” and neglect the conveyance of “spirit”, resulting in a lack of connotation in the work and an inability to resonate emotionally with the viewer. On the contrary, some works, although concise in form, can successfully convey rich charm through effective use of ink and atmosphere creation. This opposition makes artistic creation full of challenges, prompting artists to constantly explore the balance between “form” and “spirit” in order to achieve higher levels of artistic expression. In this process, “form” and “spirit” are both opposed and integrated, driving the development and innovation of freehand figure painting.[2]

## **4. The integration of form and spirit in Chinese freehand figure painting**

### **4.1 Individual expression of artists**

In freehand figure painting, the individual expression of the artist is the core of the uniqueness of the work. Every artist experiences their own unique life processes, with different cultural background and emotional world, which profoundly influence their creative style and theme choices. In the creative process, artists are not only depicting the appearance of characters, but also expressing their understanding of life, society, and humanity. For example, a painter may convey inner peace and happiness through soft lines and warm hues, while another artist may express inner struggles and conflicts through exaggerated strokes and strong contrasting colors. This individualized expression imbues each artwork with the artist’s thoughts and emotions, allowing viewers to glimpse their inner world. In addition, the individual expression of artists also reflects their re-creation and innovation of traditional techniques. Many artists integrate their personal sense of the times and modern concepts on the basis of inheriting tradition, making their works more contemporary and forward-looking. This kind of individual expression not only enriches the language of freehand figure painting, but also promotes the diversity and development of the entire art field.[3]

### **4.2 Analysis of painting works**

The analysis of freehand figure paintings usually involves a deep interpretation of “form” and “spirit”, as well as an analysis of the techniques used by the artist. These types of works are often concise in “form”, but extremely rich in conveying emotions and artistic conception. Firstly, the expression of “form” can be analyzed through careful observation of the proportion, posture, and facial expressions of characters. For example, a painter may exaggerate the gestures and gaze of a character to highlight the emotional fluctuations within. At the same time, the expression of “spirit” needs to start with the atmosphere, brushwork, and color matching of the work. A successful freehand figure painting lies not only in the accuracy of its external form, but also in its ability to effectively convey the emotions and inner mental state experienced by the characters. By analyzing specific works layer by layer, viewers can gain a deeper understanding of the themes and emotions that the artist wants to express, and obtain a richer appreciating experience from it. In addition, the historical and cultural background of the work cannot be ignored, as they provide a broader perspective for the interpretation of the work, allowing viewers to appreciate the art while understanding the profound cultural connotations it contains.

## **5. Conclusion**

In summary, in Chinese freehand figure painting, the relationship between “form” and “spirit” is the core of artistic expression. This article explores the definitions and interactions of these two, revealing their importance in conveying emotions, thoughts and connotations. “Form” represents the external appearances and features, enhancing visual impact through concise lines and exaggerated techniques. “Spirit” reflects mental temperament and spirituality, transcending concrete imag-

es and evoking resonance in the viewers. The unity of “form” and “spirit” makes the work more expressive, allowing viewers to gain a deeper understanding of the figure’s spiritual world. However, there is also opposition between the two, and the artist’s expressive techniques may lead to the neglect of the expression of “spirit”, which poses a challenge to artistic creation. The unique expression of individual artists further enriches this art form, allowing freehand figure painting to inherit tradition while showcasing contemporaneity and innovation.

## References

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