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Influence of Global Aesthetics on Chinese Aesthetics: The Adaptation of Moxie and the Case of Dafen Cun

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[About CA](#)[Journal](#)[Contact CA](#)[Links](#)[Submissions](#)[Search Journal](#)[Editorial Board](#)[Permission to Reprint](#)[Privacy](#)[Site Map](#)[Publisher](#)[Webmaster](#)*Eva Kit Wah Man***Abstract**

This article examines the practice of *moxie* or imitation in art in Chinese aesthetics, compares it with the Platonic notion of mimesis, and explicates its original meaning. I then trace its development from traditional painting to the late Qing export paintings in which traditional Chinese aesthetics was combined with Western perspectives to satisfy Western tastes. The discussion extends to the contemporary development of *moxie* in China by considering the case of Dafen Cun, an art village in Shenzhen that is famous for its copycat art practices. It explores how Dafen Cun has become a major exporter of copies of Western and Chinese paintings and how its artists achieve techniques comparable to the traditional methods of *moxie* while losing its original spirit. The final section reviews how global consumerism has exerted influences on *moxie*, which can only be justifiably approached in respective cultural and historical contexts.

Keywords

artistic self-nurturance, copying, export paintings, global aesthetics, global manufacturing, *linmo*, mimesis, *moxie*

1. The notion of *moxie* (模寫) in traditional Chinese aesthetics

The significance of *moxie* in Chinese aesthetics can be traced back to Xie He's "Six Principles of Painting" articulated in the fifth century. The last of these principles is "to convey and change by patterned representation," which translated in simpler terms means "to transmit by copying (*moxie*)" and, in simpler terms yet, to "the copying of models."^[1]

Even earlier than Xie, the celebrated fourth century painter Gu Kaizhi (c. 344-406) used the word *mo* (摹) to mean tracing. Later, Zhang Yanyuan (c. 815-877), the late Tang Dynasty art historian, scholar, and calligrapher, used the term '*moxie*' to describe the process of copying.^[2] Whether copying as Xie saw it incorporates Plato's notion of simple imitation or the notion of mimesis in the Aristotelian sense is open to debate, but it is generally agreed that in proposing this last principle of painting, Xie was calling for vitality, a harmonious manner, liveliness, technical proficiency, an aptitude for brushwork, form likeness, coloration, and composition based on his assessments of early painters' works. When the principles are read together, it becomes evident that Xie did not mean that artists should merely reproduce the paintings of others.^[3]

The concept of *moxie* laid the foundation for the imitation of the style and works of the old masters as a way to preserve the past and provide artistic inspiration.^[4] Different from the simple act of copying, the process of *moxie* in Chinese aesthetics was a necessary step in painting, particularly when a detailed or complex work was involved. A draft was required before formal transfer to the final work or medium. The completed final draft of a painting was known as a "painting pattern" or simply as a "pattern."^[5] The history of painting records that several methods were used to make this draft. One was direct tracing, that is, placing the blank paper or silk for the painting over the pattern. The translucency of the paper or silk made it possible to then trace the pattern. Another method was for the painter to hang the pattern over a window and use the backlight for tracing or to use a table with a translucent top and a lamp underneath. Gu Kaizhi described it in this way:

All those who are about to make copies should first seek those essentials, after which they may proceed to their business...When a copy is made on silk from silk, one should be placed over the other exactly, taking care as to their natural straightness, then pressed down without disturbing their alignment.^[6]

There were also numerous ways to adapt a pattern, including the powder method. This involved applying a colored powder to the back of the pattern, which was then placed on top of the painting. A pointed object made of bamboo or wood could then be used to transfer the pattern onto the paper or silk. Another method was to pierce the final draft with a fine needle, with the holes placed along the lines of the pattern, and to then tap them with a powder bag. The powder would pass through the holes and stick to the paper or silk underneath. The dots of powder were then linked together to form lines, transferring the pattern for the formal painting. The patterns

used for tracing were convenient to preserve, and could be enlarged proportionally to a desired size. Records can be found of professionals known as tracing masters in the Tang Dynasty (618-907), who made copies of ancient paintings and calligraphy.[7]

Tracing was very common in traditional Chinese art and craftsmanship, and it was practiced for a variety of reasons. One was to create a reproduction of the original for personal use. Another was to make a profit, with some individuals attempting to imitate the work of famous masters with the intention to deceive. Sometimes no deception or profit was involved. As a primary school student, for example, I was asked to trace the calligraphy of Master Wang Xizi, placing copies of his work underneath thin grass paper and tracing them on the paper. My copies were assessed on the basis of their neatness and resemblance to the original. One of the more valuable reasons for imitating or tracing the works of a master as a method of study was that it was a process of transmitting, which was believed to be a very personal experience that could enhance and transform one's own artistic performance. Whatever the purpose, some learners were very faithful in their imitation, whereas others added their own interpretations.

Is tracing or copying a practice that falls under Plato's imitation theory? In his detailed discussion of the topic, Wang Keping posits that the Platonic notion of imitation, for which he uses the term 'mimesis,' applies to painting above all and so too does the Chinese notion of *moxie*; both are used to indicate the technique of imitation.[8] In Wang's analysis, Platonic mimesis adopts the idea of approximation and, like *moxie*, does not suggest a true copy. Though Plato regarded an image as an image and art as an imitation of an imitation (of the truth), he did not require art to possess the same qualities as the original. Three levels of reality are suggested in Plato, the highest level being the original, reality, or metaphysical; the second being the manifestation of the original in the world; and the third the representation of the second level. Wang correctly points out that these three levels of reality are in league with one another (even though they are hierarchical in being value judgments), and that artistic mimesis at its best exhibits metaphysical features.[9] He concludes that Plato's notion of imitation or mimesis is never more than suggestion or evocation, and that art simply bears a likeness or resemblance to the original. The meaning of art, for Plato, was to draw the beholder's attention and encourage him to search through appearance, or artistic representation to find reality itself.[10]

Moxie in traditional Chinese aesthetics refers to *linmo* (臨摹), which means imitating or copying the works of well-known painters to learn from them. Those who practice are akin to apprentices and they practice it to acquire basic artistic skills, such as brushwork, composition, and the use of ink, strokes, lines, color, shades, and blanks.[11] The deeper meaning of *linmo* is to apprehend the significant forms of others to further one's own artistic development before it extends to *xiezhao* (寫照). *Xiezhao* (寫照) includes *xiesheng* (寫生) and *xiezhen* (寫真), which mean to engage the maturing painter in the direct portrayal of natural objects, treating nature as the teacher.[12] Wang puts it beautifully in stating that the deeper practice of *xiezhao* involves finding the delicate features of physical objects, "exemplifying an artistic sense of maturity and the aesthetic flavor of individuality." [13] Yet it is said that *linmo* and *xiezhao* are insufficient; the desired end is to produce *xinhua* (心畫), which are mind-inspired paintings that may involve an affinity with nature and appropriate abstraction and artistic inspiration to reach the state of nature.[14] This takes us into the metaphysical realm.

Wang summarizes the traditional Chinese aesthetical discourse on the meanings of *linmo*, and also categorizes them into three levels: first, learning from earlier masters by tracing their masterpieces; second, learning from nature by drawing directly from the natural landscape and living beings; third, learning from the spirit of Heaven and Earth and creating mind-inspired paintings (*xinhua*) as a consequence.[15] This reading, as

A painter learns eventually from Heaven and Earth (*yi tiandi wei shi*), intermediately from the natural landscape (*yi shanchuan wei shi*), and initially from the old masters (*yi guren wei shi*).[16]

In other words, tracing or *linmo* should only be a first step in the exercise of artistic skills and composition, serving to develop a painter's aesthetic sensibility. A painter is expected to be independent and free from the work he imitates. The aim is to develop his own artistic excellency through the initial stage of *linmo*.

Traditional comments on *linmo* suggest that a true artist should demonstrate only a moderate or adequate degree of likeness, not an excess.[17] From *linmo* to *xiezhao* constitutes the developmental path of *moxie*, and the two are interrelated points of departure from Plato's notion of simple imitation in art. As Wang puts it, *moxie* carries the sense of a gradation of practices and meanings. *Linmo* refers to imitating the works of the old masters to nurture painting skills,

whereas *xiezhao* refers to portraying natural landscapes to improve artistic expertise. Both are largely skill-oriented. Thus, the meanings of *moxie* range from imitation, representation, reproduction, make-believe, and image-making to artistic creation.[18] The two traditional practices of *linmo* and *xiezhao* result, respectively, in *linmohua* (reduplicated paintings) and *muhua* (eye-perceived paintings), neither of which I pursue further here. Wang has already presented a detailed discussion and this paper centers on a case study of the later development of reduplicated paintings in China under the influence of global aesthetics.

Echoes of these ideas can be found in the enlightening remarks on painting made by the great painter Shih Tao (c. 1642-1707), who once described “the purity and uniqueness” of his brushwork as individual, different, or even “unbalanced.”[19] Shih’s well-known statement puts it best:

I am myself because ‘I’ naturally exist. The whiskers and eyebrows of the ancients cannot grow on my face, nor can my body contain their entrails. I express my own entrails and display my own whiskers and eyebrows. Even when there may be some point of contact with some master, it is he who comes close to me, not I who am trying to become like him. Nature has endowed me thus. As for antiquity, how could I have learned from it without transforming it?[20]

The last reference I draw from to confirm this attitude is a departure from the previous ones. It is the meaning of *moxie* echoed in the writings of the early literary critic Liu Xie (c. 465-522), who recommended reading and imitating the literary conventions of master writers and poets. By emulating their style, he believed, authors could produce their own innovative and exhilarating work. He said:

When a writer casts and molds his work after the patterns of the classics, soars and alights in the manner in which philosophers and historians have soared and alighted, and is equipped with a profound knowledge of the ever-changing emotions and the ability to display with a delicate touch styles suitable to them, he will be able to conceive new ideas (*sin yi*) and carve extraordinary expressions.[21]

2. The development of *moxie* in late Qing export paintings

The traditional practice of *moxie* underwent tremendous changes in Chinese export painting in the late Qing period. This term refers to a particular genre of painting that was produced in large quantities in Guangzhou in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when foreign trade flourished and foreign merchants from all over the world converged on the city. The development of Chinese export painting took place in the social and cultural context of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when Guangzhou became the base for the production and distribution of art works intended to be sold overseas. It is recorded that European and American businessmen who did business in China were active primarily in the area of the Guangzhou Shisanhang (the 13 markets of Canton, as the city was then known), where the export art market also thrived. In the mid-nineteenth century, Tongwen and Jingyuan Streets in Guangzhou Shisanhang (十三行) were the two prime destinations for foreign visitors. The shops there sold decorative calligraphy, art work, ceramics, and antiques. According to the travel guides of the day written by Westerners, if a person wanted to do business in Guangzhou, he needed to find a business associate of good repute (such as the Qing Dynasty tycoon Houqua) and also a skillful portrait painter, such as Lamqua, to paint his portrait. American missionary Samuel Wells Williams recorded seeing copied paintings all over Guangzhou and the surrounding region:

There are many shops in Canton, Whampoa, and Hong Kong, where maps and charts are copied, and a few where portraits are made. Lamqua, who received instruction in perspective from Mr. Chinnery, is the best known artist among the natives. Portraits, landscapes, and scenes are copied in oil, in large quantities, priced from \$3 to \$100 a piece; pictures and engravings are accurately copied, and some of the views and Chinese landscapes are tolerably drawn.[22]

Williams mentioned in his notes that the painter Lamqua (林呱 Kwan Kiu Cheong) was from Nanhai in Guangdong Province. His brother Tingqua (庭呱 Kwan Luen Cheong) was also a professional painter, specializing in gouache paintings. The two set up their studios in Tongwen Street, and gained great acclaim among foreign customers, who were eager to have them paint their portraits.[23] [See Figure 1.]

Fig. 1. *Studio of Tingqua (Kwan Luen Cheong) in Guangdong.* (Source: The Hong Kong Museum of Art.) <http://www.mask9.com/node/32379>.

However, when Shanghai, Fuzhou, Xiamen, and Ningbo officially opened their doors to the export artists, Guangzhou's privileges in this market disappeared almost immediately. The resulting exit of foreign businessmen meant that the city's painters lost their main source of income. The development of export paintings entered a period of stagnancy and individual painters rarely had a personal signature. Painters as skilled as Lamqua became rare. At the same time, photography was becoming increasingly popular, which prompted many art shops to switch to the business of replicating enlarged portrait photos rather than painting portraits from life. A natural result was fewer and fewer artists with distinctive individual styles.[24]

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the replicating phenomenon came under the influence of and subject to the preferences of Western customers. Trade between China and England increased from the middle of the eighteenth century onwards, and Guangzhou (Canton) was initially the only port open to the West. Western traders commissioned albums of people and scenes of daily life, attempting to capture every aspect of Chinese life from birth to death to satisfy Western curiosity about the country. These albums were produced primarily for export. Before photography arrived in the 1840s, paintings were the only way that Western traders could show life in China to their families and friends back home. Fifteen categories of export paintings were classified in the Qing period: (1) Canton harbor and the city of Canton; (2) the costumes of emperors, empresses, officials, and commoners; (3) street and marketplace occupations in Canton; (4) handicraft workshops in Foshan; (5) Guangdong government offices, furnishings, and official processional equipment; (6) punishments; (7) gardens and mansions; (8) religious buildings and sacrificial arrangements; (9) the urging of people to stop smoking opium; (10) indoor furnishings, plants, and birds; (11) the Ocean Banner Temple; (12) scenes from dramas; (13) boats, ships, and river scenes in Guangdong Province; (14) Beijing life and customs; and (15) Beijing shop signs.[25] [See Figure 2.]

Fig. 2. *Celebrating the Mid-Autumn Festival, Guangzhou*. Early nineteenth Century, Anonymous. Oil on canvas (Source: The Hong Kong Museum of Art.) http://hkmasvr.lcsd.gov.hk/HKMACS_DATA/web/Object.nsf/HKMACS_DATA/web/Object.nsf/0/41AF92AA2AAB94DA48257068001331E5?OpenDocument&charset=big5&lang=c.

These paintings, usually produced in gouache on pith paper, were executed in Chinese studios by a number of painters, each specializing in one aspect, such as heads, clothing, trees, and so on. Tingqua (c. 1809-1870) was the best-known artist working in Guangzhou in the nineteenth century. He and Youqua (fl. 1840-1870) were highly prized for their exquisite detail, bright flat colors, and Western perspective.[26] Their styles had a charming naïveté and their art practices were influenced by Western painters living on the south coast of China in the first half of the nineteenth century, among them Chinnery, Thomas and William Daniell, Auguste Bourget, William Prinsep, Thomas Watson, and Charles Wirgman. Chinnery's sketches and oil paintings of Macau and portraits of sea captains, important merchants, traders, and their families give us a vivid picture of life in the area in the nineteenth century. The Chinese painters of the day followed Western styles, adopted Western perspectives, and copied Western work, but they also incorporated their own artistic choices and Chinese traditions where appropriate.[27][See Figure 3.]

Fig. 3. *Portrait of George Chinnery* by Lamqua, 1835. (Source: The Hong Kong Museum of Art.) <http://www.mask9.com/node/32379>

It is noteworthy that most Chinese export paintings were executed in Western media and employed Western techniques. The effects of these Western aesthetic qualities are demonstrated in many exemplary works, some of which are shown in *Artistic Inclusion of the East and West: Apprentice to Master*, an exhibition presented by the Hong Kong Museum of Art in 2011.[28] For example, paintings depicting the Tingqua's studio show painters from southern China sitting upright, each holding up a picture and trying to imitate it with his paint brushes. Some of them hold up a photograph or printed copy of a Western masterpiece with one hand while using the other to trace the painting onto a piece of paper for later transfer to canvas. Although it is interesting to place the modern development of export painting within the tradition of imitation among Chinese painters, there were many distinctions between the artists who produced these works and their Western counterparts. An obvious distinction is how the two dealt with space and lighting, which was well illustrated in the aforementioned exhibition.[29]

The paintings on exhibit showed that Western painters emphasized outdoor sketching, whereas the export art painters, who worked primarily in studios, are not recorded as having engaged in this activity. Although Chinese and Western painters both used canvas with a base of paint and plaster, the former preferred to use water-based pigments with a thin coating. They also liked to

use four small corks or pieces of bamboo to fix the corners of their frames. *Chinese Painters Imitating*, a painting from around 1800, illustrates the Chinese style. In front of the artist is a portrait of a half-nude Western female figure; he holds his paint brush as if it is a Chinese writing brush, but he works with his eyes and hands.[30]

Borget's *Temple on the Henan Canal* was compared to Tingqua's *Temple in Henan, Guangzhou* in the Hong Kong exhibition.[31] [See Figures 4 and 5.] Borget worked from a sketch in this painting, whereas Tingqua rendered in great detail many aspects of the same landscape, such as the dilapidated temple gates and the rocky shoreline, but retouched the trees and water stream and made the dragon sculptures on the roof of the temple more life-like. Of course, these elements are indicative of the regular style and methods of a Chinese painter. There were a number of reasons for such amendments, among them national pride and artistic principles as the painter understood them and was bound to follow them.[32] The piece I enjoyed most was *Receiving Guest* by an unnamed export painter. This painting was used for comparison with Borget's use of perspective.[33] [See Figure 6.] The painting invites viewers to explore a huge garden as if from above. Although the painter was indeed imitating, he was apparently sufficiently free to adopt the overhead perspective in his work.

Fig. 4. *Temple on the Henan Canal, Guangzhou*. 1838, Auguste Borget. Colored lithograph. (Source: The Hong Kong Museum of Art.)
<http://thehkproject.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/screen-shot-2012-03-07-at-11-36-00-pm.png>

Fig. 5. *A Temple in Henan, Guangzhou*. Mid-nineteenth Century, Tingqua/GUAN Lianchang. Colored lithograph. (Source: The Hong Kong Museum of Art.)
http://hkmasvr.lcsd.gov.hk/HKMACS_DATA/web/Object.nsf/0/39b95ee08e43633148257068000c329a

Fig. 6. Upper: *Interior of the Sea-screen Temple, Guangzhou*. 1838, Auguste Borget. Colored lithograph. (Source: The Hong Kong Museum of Art.) Lower: "Receiving Guest", unknown export painter. (Source: The Hong Kong Museum of Art.)
http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201109/26/P201109260243_photo_1031636.htm

3. The late development of *moxie* in Dafen Cun (大芬村)

The foregoing discussion makes it clear that global consumerism exerted further influence on traditional Chinese aesthetics, including *moxie*. We now turn to the most recent development of *moxie* in present-day China by considering the case of Dafen Cun, or Dafen Village, an art village in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, which is famous for its copycat practices. This village is home to numerous art workers who produce hundreds of cheap handmade copies of popular Western and Chinese paintings with the aid of computer-generated images. They are created purely for consumption purposes, like the commercial export paintings of the late nineteenth century. The difference is that the export paintings in the late Qing Dynasty presented Chinese subjects to meet the interests of Western customers, while Dafen Cun copies Western work of popular interest for both Chinese and international customers. [See Figure 7.]



Fig. 7. Dafen Cun today. (Photo by author.)

Dafen Cun has become the largest producer of imitation oil paintings in the world, a place where

one can pick up an imitation of Monet, Manet, or Matisse for less than US\$20. Foreign visitors to Dafen usually justify their consumption of such copied work as an affordable way to put good art up in their homes. Officials commend Dafen as a model of business enterprise for the rest of the China to follow because it receives very little governmental intervention or support.[34]

Dafen began and has flourished as a grassroots movement. Even its name, which translates literally as "Da Vinci," is a copy. The Dafen story reportedly began in 1988, when Hong Kong painter and businessman Huang Jiang (Wong Kong), who specialized in artistic reproductions, decided that the costs were too high in Hong Kong and settled in the Dafen area. He was quickly joined by dozens of talented artists from all over China who began to sell copies around the world, thus inventing "the mass production of copies of art" and giving birth to the Dafen Cun phenomenon.[35] Dafen was originally a Hakka village with narrow streets and an area of 4 square kilometers. Today it is home to more than 600 galleries and studios in which more than 5,000 painters and craftsmen live and operate. Some of them are real artists but more of them are amateurs acting as copy technicians.[36] When I visited Dafen in April 2012, many shops featured recruitment advertisements for inexperienced "technicians."

Over the years, the paintings, calligraphy, and sculptures created in Dafen Cun have come to be recognized as a kind of brand both in China and abroad. The production is cheap and efficient, and numerous retailers of art materials and frames have joined the painters, studios, and galleries. Together they provide good prices and speedy service. In addition to individual customers, Dafen Cun attracts buyers who represent property developers, hotels, and restaurants. These enterprises have increased the demand for decorations because of the rapid economic growth of Shenzhen, China's first Special Economic Zone. There is also a major export market for copies of Western and Chinese paintings and an internal market comprising rich businessmen who want copies of traditional Chinese artwork and masterpieces.[37] [See Figure 8.]

Fig. 8. Dafen paintings on display. Source:

<http://artjour.files.wordpress.com/2012/07/dafen-paintings.jpg>

The character of Dafen has changed considerably since the economic crisis of 2008, which dramatically reduced the volume of exports. From being a place dedicated to the mass copying of paintings, it has been transformed into a mixture of art galleries, studios, bars, and tea houses with regular exhibitions and art presentations. It has also become one of Shenzhen's main tourist attractions. The city government proudly announced these figures in 2009: 5000 painters were working in Dafen art village, producing one third of the world's commercial oil paintings. The announcement did not differentiate between genuine work and copied work. The city government also touted the village's 800 galleries.[38] One foreign tourist visiting Dafen Cun gave this lively account:

We went out of the village proper, and entered a street, then climbed the stairs of one of the old, shabby buildings. On the third floor there was a small apartment where colors and dry and fresh paintings seemed, literally, everywhere. Smell of turpentine and oil. There was everything: Canaletto, Picasso, Monet, Klimt, Van Gogh The quality was not bad, and several works were far from contemptible 10 euros for a good reproduction of at least four feet [by] eight. Upstairs they sat me down in front of a computer and served me a glass of oolong tea.

One of the sales staff was nice enough to share photographs of some of the artworks they had recently produced. Would I be interested in a Gauguin, or perhaps a Warhol print? Indeed both the quality and volume of art on display were impressive.

The catalogs captured hundreds if not thousands of diverse styles and subjects using different styles and in various media... All of the works were copies, but they could create a painting out of a favorite photograph for a price of 80 dollars.[39]

There is a market for original art in Dafen, but most of the village's business is geared to foreign buyers and art dealers asking for imitation art and Chinese customers asking for duplications in the traditional Chinese style.

How do the art workers of Dafen imitate? When I visited the village I witnessed scenes very similar to those of the studios of Lamqua and Tinqu in the late nineteenth century, the only difference being that the models for imitation are now mostly computer-generated photographs and images. Although customers sometimes provide photos, copies of originals are usually acquired from websites, particularly the paintings of famous masters. The painters of Dafen Cun stand or sit for many hours working diligently with their hands and eyes, while the images they are copying are stuck on a wooden board or held in their hands. The painters are trained to copy

by hand. Although tracing may sometimes still be involved and accomplished in ways both similar to and different from the traditional methods of *linmo*, artistic aspirations are not involved. [See Figure 9.]

These art workers do not imitate for their own artistic development, nor do they make attempts at appropriation or the demonstration of national pride, as did the Chinese painters of export art in the nineteenth century. These earlier painters incorporated Chinese aesthetic ideals and effects into Western styles, compromising Chinese styles at the request of Western customers. At Dafen Cun, I watched a painter mark out an area of canvas for coloring, from time to time checking the photograph he kept at hand. He did this exactly and faithfully, aiming at verisimilitude but with no artistic spark in his eye. No elevation of the country's artistic level can be read into this act of imitation. [See Figure 10.]



Fig. 9. A Dafen Painter at work. (Source: photo taken by author)



Fig. 10. Dafen Painters at work. (Source: photo taken by author)

Visitors' responses to Dafen Cun can be critical, as this fairly typical judgment shows:

Creators of original artworks, artisans of both traditional and contemporary visual art forms [who have] dedicated their lives to the pursuit of original artistic expression, [refuse] to succumb to the mass manufacturing revolution in Dafen that has typified China's resurgence in the global economy.[\[40\]](#)

4. Influence of global aesthetics on Chinese aesthetics: adaptation of *moxie*

Paul Crowther argues that in an era of accelerating global consumerism, techniques arise that favor the mass reproduction of images. These developments have suppressed the normative dimension of aesthetics by a consumerist sensibility, tending toward cultural mediocrity.[\[41\]](#) This sensibility seems to have infused Dafen Cun from the very beginning. As Crowther suggests, in the process of selling copied art and effectively implementing large-scale marketing strategies, Dafen Cun has overlooked key questions of ontology, aesthetic experience, and cultural excellence, at least where *moxie* is concerned.[\[42\]](#)

The key questions with which Crowther concerns himself are articulated in his discussion of mimesis. He states that the sensory or imaginative vividness of mimesis represents its objects as if they were immediately present, and thus there is no need to bring in an aesthetic. However, he stresses that the work qua representation must also be understood as having some differences from that which it represents. This is reminiscent of the discourses on *moxie* in Chinese

aesthetics. These discourses refer to the different levels of understanding, including ontological and metaphysical realizations, that are involved in cognitive proximity to and distance from the represented object.

Crowther believes that there is a formative power at work in and through the sensible or imaginative particularity of the medium.[43] It is here that we are reminded of the three levels of learning in *moxie*, i.e., learning from the great masters about artistic choice and skills; learning from nature by drawing directly from the natural landscape and living beings; and learning from the spirit of Heaven and Earth and creating mind-inspired paintings as a consequence. These levels of learning correspond to Crowther's cultural excellence, aesthetic experience, and ontology, and constitute the intrinsically valuable experiences he mentions. The expectation in mimesis, and in *moxie*, is that the mimetic power of aesthetic embodiment manifests itself in ontological experience and cultural excellence. In Crowther's words, belief in the ritual potency (of *moxie*) is enabled by its aesthetic power.[44] Hence, even if the copying techniques in places such as Dafen Cun are highly sophisticated, the result is little more than forms of resemblance.

What went wrong in the development of *moxie* under the influence of globalization? It is generally understood that the rise of capitalism and marketing has been accompanied by the addition of aesthetic qualities to products of technology so as to attract customers and for reasons of surplus.[45] Aesthetic appeals are coupled with cults, religion, politics, and now economics to legitimate the consumption, and these appeals are often confused with art, which is reduced to aesthetic artifacts.[46] As Aleksandar Cuckovic put it so well, the way in which art was replaced allowed the free dissemination of artifacts with all kinds of dubious aesthetic values. He says this creation often led to the mass-production of kitsch as the final result.[47] Art is mixed with the ready-made and aesthetic experience with daily experience. People's aesthetic appetite is dulled and true art is replaced by, for example, the technology-aided copying methods employed in Dafen Cun. The mass production of kitsch here is imitative. Copied art produces a feeling of distance from the original work and the real aesthetic experience that it created, and the aesthetic content present in these imitated works of art does not correspond to their true aesthetic value, as Cuckovic correctly suggests.[48] [See Figure 11.]

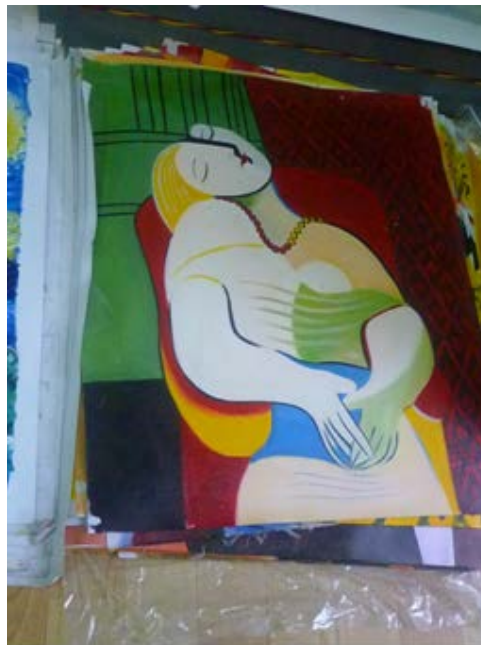


Fig. 11. Work by Dafen painters. (photo taken by author)

Gregory Currie draws a distinction between forgery and fakery. The former consists of free invention whereas the latter is based on replication, as in the case of Dafen Cun.[49] The term 'fake art' has negative connotations, carrying the implication of deception. The artists of Dafen Cun produce more fake art than forged art, not because they are unable to freely invent but because of customer demand and the dictates of the market. The Shenzhen government is proud of the work that the art village produces, though not because it constitutes fakery or is meant to deceive. Rather, the government praises the work because the act of copying has a long tradition in China and is regarded as a road to real artistry in Chinese aesthetics. The genuine meanings of *moxie* are neglected, as is the realization that the road from imitation and copying to real artistry is now blocked or diverted for other reasons or purposes. The Shenzhen government leaves aside the question of international copyright or "certified copy" (which a future, extended version of this

article will explore). It sponsors the Dafen artists to demonstrate their copying skills internationally and as it did during the World Expo 2010 in Shanghai. These artists are also representatives of public art education in the city. [See Figure 12.]



Fig. 12. Official photo of Dafen painters in training course.

Promotional materials at the World Expo are in praise of Dafen Cun and refer to it in the context of China's economic positioning:

This resulting agglomeration was the perfect combination of the urban village being open to ideas as well as the urgent space demands required by [the] vast industrial expansion during China's rapid urbanization.^[50]

This reminds us of Cuckovic's point that the mechanism and surpluses of capitalism are invested in further production, leading to the development of the economies of scale and the spreading of distribution, with global communications infrastructure to support them.^[51] The city attributes the artistic achievements of Dafen Cun not to the artists who work there but to government support, which is regarded as key to the village's rapid integration into the urban fabric of the surrounding city.^[52] It is obvious that Shenzhen has expanded Dafen's "industrial ecology" and values its contribution to producing an innovative urban culture. This art village is read as "a promising sustainable urban development for China's rapid urbanization." The Dafen promotional brochure makes explicit Dafen's role in the globalization of art. Dafen's oil paintings, like other mass-produced commodities, can be shipped to places around the world in containers. It is because of this capability that Dafen was instantly transformed from an obscure Hakka village to a crucial production link in the chain of global manufacturing.^[53]

This development, at least, is one that the country can strongly endorse. Meanwhile, some classically trained artists in China today continue to learn by copying the work of the masters with the aims of artistic self-nurturance and development. This runs parallel to the copycat craze of art villages like Dafen Cun. Wang Keping's expanded reading seems particularly apt in the three developmental phases of *moxie* of Chinese art including the practice in Dafen Cun:

[The] Chinese notion of *moxie* and the Platonic notion of mimesis are culturally specific rather than universal, disregarding their seemingly shared aspects in imitation or duplication at the elementary levels ... They could be justifiably approached and understood only when they are placed in their respective cultural contexts.^[54]

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Endnotes

[1] Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih (compilers and editors), *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 40.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.

[3] Katharine Burnett, "Through Masters' Eyes: Copying and Originality in Contemporary Chinese Landscape Painting," in *Shanshui in Twentieth Century China*, ed. Shanghai Calligraphy and Painting Publishing House (Shanghai: Shanghai Calligraphy and Painting Publishing House, 2006), pp. 317-334; ref. on p. 318.

[4] National Palace Museum (Taipei), The Tradition of Re-presenting Art: Originality and Reproduction in Chinese Painting and Calligraphy, National Palace Museum, April 13, 2013, accessed April 18, 2013, http://www.npm.gov.tw/exh96/re-presenting/intro_en.html.

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] See note 2.

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] Keping Wang, "The Platonic Mimesis and the Chinese Moxie," *Diversity and Universality in Aesthetics: International Yearbook of Aesthetics*, 14 (2010), (Beijing: Institute of Philosophy, CASS, 2010), 213-232; ref. on 213.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 218.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 217.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 219.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 220.

[13] *Loc. cit.*

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 221.

[15] *Ibid.*, pp. 221-222.

[16] Qichang Dong, "Hua chan shi sui bi (Essays on the Painting of Zen)" in *Zhong guo meixueshi ziliao xuebian (Selected Sources of the History of Chinese Aesthetics)* vol. 2., ed. Peking University Department of Philosophy, (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 1981), ref. on 147.

[17] Wang, after reading the notes of famous painters Qi Baishi and Huang Binhong, came up with this conclusive suggestion. See Wang, p. 227, note 34.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 229.

[19] Katharine Burnett, "Through Masters' Eyes: Copying and Originality in Contemporary Chinese Landscape Painting," in *Shanshui in Twentieth Century China*, ed. Shanghai Calligraphy and Painting Publishing House (Shanghai: Shanghai Calligraphy and Painting Publishing House, 2006), pp. 317-334; ref. on pp. 322-323.

[20] Shih Tao, "Enlightening Remarks on Painting" (Pacific Asia Museum Monographs, no.1), trans. Richard E. Strassberg (Pasadena, CA: Pacific Asia Museum, 1989), p. 65.

[21] Liu Xie, "Wenxin diaolung" ("Wind and Bone"), in *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons: A Study of Thought and Pattern in Chinese Literature*, trans. Vincent Yu-chung Shih (Taipei: Chung Hwa Book Co., Ltd., 1970), p. 230.

[22] See Samuel Wells Williams, *The Chinese Commercial Guide* (Hong Kong: A Shortrede & Co., 1863).

[23] *Ibid.*

[24] *Ibid.*

[25] Tzi-Cheng Wang, Wood, Frances., Lo, Andrew and Song Jia-yu, "Chinese Export Paintings of the Qing Period in The British Library," National Central University, accessed April 18, 2013, http://pine.cc.ncu.edu.tw/~ncutop1/en/?post_type=featured&p=624.

[26] *Ibid.*

[27] The Englishman George Chinnery lived in Macau from 1825 until his death in 1852. Thomas and William Daniell were also well-regarded Western artists. They visited Guangzhou in 1785. A number of other painters who worked in oils or watercolors worked alongside Chinnery. They include Auguste Bourget, a well-known French artist who lived in China and Macau from 1838 until the 1840s; William Prinsep, who had studied drawing under Chinnery in Calcutta; Thomas Boswell Watson, who was Chinnery's doctor; and Charles Wirgman, who was the official illustrator and reporter for The Illustrated London News and was based in Hong Kong for four years from 1859, making several forays into China. *Ibid.*

[28] Hong Kong Museum of Art, "Artistic Inclusion of the East and West: Apprentice to Master" (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Museum of Art, 2011).

[29] An example is the comparison made between the painting *Temple on the Henan Canal, Guangzhou* drawn by Borget and the painting of the same title attributed to Tingqua. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

[30] See the portrait entitled, *Chinese Artist Copying*, *Ibid.*, p. 22.

[31] See note 29.

[32] One can get this impression between the lines from the epilogue of the exhibition, *Ibid.*, p. 107.

[33] *Ibid.*, pp. 50-53.

[34] Artjour, "Field Report: Dafen Village (China), Part 2: Looking for original artworks in a village of fakes," Artjour, Accessed April 21, 2103, <http://artjour.files.wordpress.com>.

[35] Mario Maurizio Gobbo, "Shenzhen and the Dafen Cun (大芬村)," Mariomauriziogobbo, accessed April 21, 2013, <http://marcomauriziogobbo.wordpress.com/2012/09/14/shenzhen-and-the-dafen-cun>.

[36] Shenzhen City Planning and National Resources Committee, Dafen in Shenzhen, The

Regeneration of an Urban Village (World Expo 2010) (Shenzhen: Urbanus, 2010), p. 21.

[37] See the figures shown in *Ibid.*, p. 28.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

[39] See Note 35. <http://marcomauriziogobbo.wordpress.com/2012/09/14/shenzhen-and-the-dafen-cun>.

[40] Artjour, "Field Report: Dafen Village (China), Part 2: Looking for original artworks in a village of fakes," Artjour, Accessed April 21, 2103, <http://artjour.files.wordpress.com>.

[41] Paul Crowther, "Normativity, not Cultural Theory: Aesthetics in the Age of Global Consumerism," *International Yearbook of Aesthetics*, Vol.8 (Ljubljana: Institute of Philosophy, 2004), 29.

[42] Paul Crowther, "Defining Art, Defending the Canon, Contesting Culture," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 44, 4 (2004), 361-377; ref.on 369.

[43] *Loc. cit.*

[44] *Loc. cit.*

[45] Aleksandar Cuckovic, "Rise of the Aesthetic Experience and the Process of Globalization," accessed April 10, 2013, <http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/academy/content/pdf/participant-papers/2011-08-loam/Rise-of-the-aesthetic-experience-and-the-process-of-globalization-Aleksandar.pdf>, p. 2.

[46] *Ibid.*, p. 4.

[47] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

[48] *Ibid.*, p. 8.

[49] Gregory Currie, *An Ontology of Art* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989).

[50] Note 36, p. 18.

[51] Aleksandar Cuckovic, "Rise of the Aesthetic Experience and the Process of Globalization," accessed April 10, 2013, <http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/academy/content/pdf/participant-papers/2011-08-loam/Rise-of-the-aesthetic-experience-and-the-process-of-globalization-Aleksandar.pdf>, p. 3.

[52] See note 50, p. 22.

[53] *Ibid.*, p. 54.

[54] Wang, ref. on p. 232.

Figures (elinks)

1. *Studio of Tingqua (Kwan Luen Cheong) in Guangdong*. (Source: The Hong Kong Museum of Art.) Accessed September 9, 2013. <http://www.mask9.com/node/32379>.

2. *Celebrating the Mid-Autumn Festival, Guangzhou*. Early nineteenthth Century, Anonymous. Oil on canvas (Source: The Hong Kong Museum of Art.) Accessed September 9, 2013. http://hkmasvr.lcsd.gov.hk/HKMACS_DATA/web/Object.nsf/HKMACS_DATA/web/Object.nsf/0/41AF92AA2AAB94DA48257068001331E5?OpenDocument&charset=big5&lang=c.

3. *Portrait of George Chinnery* by Lamqua,1835. (Source: The Hong Kong Museum of Art.) Accessed September 9, 2013. <http://www.mask9.com/node/32379>

4. *Temple on the Henan Canal, Guangzhou*. 1838, Auguste Borget. Colored lithograph. (Source: The Hong Kong Museum of Art.) Accessed September 9, 2013.

<http://thehkproject.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/screen-shot-2012-03-07-at-11-36-00-pm.png>

5. A Temple in Henan, Guangzhou. Mid-nineteenth Century, Tingqua/GUAN Lianchang. Colored lithograph. (Source: The Hong Kong Museum of Art.) Accessed September 9, 2013.

http://hkmasvr.lcsd.gov.hk/HKMACS_DATA/web/Object.nsf/0/39b95ee08e43633148257068000c329a

6. Upper: *Interior of the Sea-screen Temple, Guangzhou*. 1838, Auguste Borget. Colored lithograph. (Source: The Hong Kong Museum of Art.) Lower: "Receiving Guest", unknown export painter. (Source: The Hong Kong Museum of Art.) Accessed September 9, 2013.

http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201109/26/P201109260243_photo_1031636.htm

7. Dafen Cun today (photo taken by author).

8. Dafen paintings on display. Accessed September 9, 2013. (Source:

<http://artjour.files.wordpress.com/2012/07/dafen-paintings.jpg>)

9. A Dafen painter at work (photo taken by author).

10. Dafen painters at work (photo taken by author).

11. Work by Dafen Painters (photo taken by author).

12. Official photo of Dafen painters in training course, from Shenzhen City Planning and National Resources Committee, *Dafen in Shenzhen, The Regeneration of an Urban Village* (World Expo 2010) (Shenzhen: Urbanus, 2010), p.16.
