

# Wang Jiayin’s “Yun Jian breeze”— On the calligraphic in oil painting

Zhang Yizhi<sup>1, a</sup>, Kang Jimin<sup>2, b, \*</sup>, Huang Xia<sup>2, c</sup>,

<sup>1</sup>The University of Edinburgh, Old College, South Bridge, Edinburgh, Scotland, EH8 9YL, United Kingdom

<sup>2</sup>Dianmei Times (Beijing) Exhibition Co., Ltd. Units 1401–1404, 14th Floor, Building 3, Cheng ying Center, No. 5 Laiguang ying West Road, Chaoyang District, Beijing 100000, China

a.zhangyizhi\_0098255@yahoo.com, b.jimin\_kang\_@yahoo.com, c.huangxiaxia\_st\_4405@icloud.com

\*Corresponding Author

**Abstract:** Wang Jiayin re-casts the Shanghai-school spirit with “Yun Jian Breeze.” Layering acrylic and oil, he grafts traditional landscape imagery, calligraphic dot-and-line, and Western expressionism into a contemporary easel idiom that carries both ink resonance and chromatic soul. Serial motifs migrate from the figurative toward the mind-image, releasing a symphonic interplay of colour, structure and texture at the threshold of abstraction, and offering a living, sustainable Shanghai model for the localisation of oil painting.

**Keywords:** Wang Jiayin; Yun Jian Breeze; calligraphic quality in oil painting; Shanghai-school art; localisation of Chinese oil painting; expression and xieyi

## 1. Introduction

Since the early 20th century, Chinese oil painting has undergone a sustained search for localisation. At its core lies the challenge of grafting an imported medium onto native traditions—melding Western oil language with classical Chinese techniques, concepts and spiritual ambience—so that the transplant truly “flows in the veins of the Chinese nation.” Early experiments centred on the quest for a recognisably Chinese voice in oil, a pursuit that became a hallmark of the Western-style painting movement and, more broadly, of Sino-Western synthesis. From borrowing ready-made idioms to selecting and reshaping styles, the evolution of Chinese oil painting has always kept localisation in its sights. In short, the quest for a “Chinese breeze” in oils is essentially an inquiry into the calligraphic—into the possibility of a written, xieyi spirit within easel painting. This has remained one of the central academic questions confronting Chinese oil art throughout the twentieth century and beyond.



Figure 1 Wang Jiayin Landscape 170 × 120 cm, 2014

## 2. Shanghai's "Great Elegance": Gene of Yun Jian breeze

Seen through the lens of Shanghai's art history, its openness lies in the alloy of elitism, internationalism and commercialism. Hovering between realism and expression, the city's painters have long sought a poised, spiritual equilibrium. It is this balance that often lets Shanghai art appear as "minor elegance" (*xiao-ya*), while its due "great elegance" (*da-ya*) is forgotten. Where, then, is the great elegance? —in the "breeze from amid the clouds" (*yunjian fengdu*).

By diversifying style, form and creative concept, Shanghai artists have enlarged their humanistic horizon and scholarly ambition, gradually forging a path congruent with the city's cultural DNA and exploiting its distinctive strengths. This enduring "yunjian breeze" has made Shanghai art a force Chinese visual culture cannot ignore, effecting a transition from classical to modern modalities.

Shanghai painting once scaled a historical peak of "great elegance." Figures such as Liu Haisu, Lin Fengmian, Wu Dayu, Zhang Chongren and Guan Liang stand on that summit, all imbued with the same breeze. Their core concern was the interrogation of values and the humanistic spirit embedded in easel language. Indeed, cultural identity always runs parallel to local artists' individuality and formal style. Since the 20th century Shanghai's explorations in expressivity have remained a vital gene in its art pool.

After the thematic-art era of the mid-century, realist painting still needed refinement and breakthrough in late-1970s and early-1980s Shanghai. Thanks to manifold artists' efforts, a pluralistic pattern of linguistic inquiry gradually took shape—hope for both revival and renewed success in Shanghai painting.



Figure 2 Wang Jiayin Emerald-Mountain Dwelling 140 × 280 cm, 2013

This very hope affirms the character of “great elegance” in art—an ethos steeped in humanistic quality. Such quality demands a trinity of the concrete, the ideated and the mind-image, forging the artistic bearing and realm distinctive of the Shanghai-school spirit. Serial conceptions of works gradually incubate specific motifs, reveal particular humanistic feelings and scholarly ambition, and allow for multiple formal variations in the mode of creation.

### 3. Wang Jiayin: A modern confluence of Xie yi and expression

Within the “breeze from amid the clouds,” Wang Jiayin is the vivid interpreter of this bearing and realm. Rich in formal construction and adept in realist technique, he departs from classical verisimilitude; equally steeped in lofty xieyi spirit, he transcends literati ink conventions. By wedding xieyi to Western expressionism, he infuses modern life’s concepts, moods and intuitions. Rhythmic brushwork and symbolic space signal multiple transitions from realist image to formal language.

### 4. Calligraphic test: Dot-and-line structure versus planar reality

The so-called “calligraphic issue in oil painting” probes the xieyi spirit embedded in the medium—its relation to traditional Chinese materials and schemata. Calligraphic quality hinges on a dot-and-line structure that does not copy appearances but aligns with abstract mental imagery. This schema, centred on linear dots and strokes, disassembles the planar, block-based schema of literal reality. Between agile linearity and the void’s alternation of solid and empty, easel vocabulary echoes the Chinese brush language of dry/moist, thick/thin, rise/fall, and beginning/continuation/transition/conclusion. Through such calligraphic trials, Wang Jiayin’s “cloud-breeze” retains the root of traditional spirit, explores visual rhythm within a cross-media context, and keeps faith with our historic mission to localise oil painting.



Figure 3 Wang Jiayin Brookside Pavilion acrylic & oil on canvas, 105 × 150 cm, 2009



Figure 4 Wang Jiayin Poetic Autumn Mountain 220 × 70 cm, 2007

## 5. Shanghai memory re-combined: From oblivion to renewal

Shanghai, long one of China's modern art capitals, harbours a wealth of resources on the localisation of oil painting. Early last century its salons and journals buzzed with related ideas; Huang Binhong's remark that "Western painting, moving from Impressionism to abstraction and from dots to lines, increasingly converges with the East" is typical of such thinking. That convergence—dialogue between Western Expressionism and Chinese *xieyi*—gave the Shanghai milieu much of its vitality. Yet in current discourse this strand is often forgotten; historical artefacts and artistic memory have not been properly re-integrated. Wang Jiayin's practice now invites us to re-examine the calligraphic in oil, to treat it as a major Chinese artistic resource demanding memory-repair, canonisation, valuation and cultural regeneration. Our focus thus shifts from academic modelling systems to freer formal languages rich in humanistic substance, allowing viewers to move beyond quasi-natural appearance and re-experience the intelligence and taste proper to easel painting—the precious interplay of figurative structure and abstract life.

## 6. The force of Tranquillity: Recent works toward abstraction and expression

Renowned in Shanghai circles as a gentle, exemplary mentor, Wang Jiayin peppers lively conversation with flashes of artistic insight, projecting far-reaching exploratory power without ostentation. Recent solo exhibitions—"The Force of Tranquillity," "Cloud Rising," and now "Yun Jian Breeze"—have drawn growing public attention, making his development a key barometer of contemporary Shanghai easel art. His newest canvases lean further toward abstraction and expression; colour, configuration, brushwork and surface are meant to be read directly, the result of continual distillation of his own pictorial language. Hybridising oil with ink concepts, he juxtaposes classical and contemporary humanist elements in bold, sweeping reconstructions. Compositions may look casually improvised, yet every dispersal of pigment or linear flutter is underpinned by acute, meticulous calculation—proof of extraordinary acumen in the crafting of humanistic imagery.



Figure 5 Wang Jiayin Listening to the Water acrylic & oil on canvas, 120 × 170 cm, 2010

## 7. Cloud-Edge Light: Shanghai Painting's 21st-Century Turn

Today's easel-art agenda is crowded with large and small topics, yet the crux lies in fusing contemporary lived experience into China's grand cultural tradition and the smaller, local continuum of the Shanghai school. Here one senses the boundless appeal of the Chinese artistic image—its depth and breadth—while pushing past the limits between figuration and abstraction, exploring the subtle threshold where illusion turns. Wang Jiayin's latest exhibitions and the exploratory practice they present pose an urgent question: how to achieve a conscious visual transformation.

Through his art we can observe Shanghai painters, within the pluralistic climate of "all rivers running into the sea," as they search with wit and wisdom for equilibrium between realism and expression. In so

doing they elevate their humanistic feeling and scholarly ambition, gradually aligning their creative path with the cultural bedrock of the Shanghai school and giving play to its distinctive strengths. The so-called “Yun Jian breeze” is thus more than a personal hallmark; it is a beacon inviting attention to more masters of the Huangpu, so that together they may forge a new academic radiance for Shanghai painting in the twenty-first century.

## **8. Conclusion**

“Yun Jian breeze” is not merely a stylistic label for one painter; it is the emblem of a renewed self-transformation within the Shanghai-school tradition. By deploying calligraphic qualities to dismantle the media barrier between oil painting and Chinese ink, Wang Jiayin answers contemporary experience with a “great elegance” of humanistic character. His work reminds us that localization is not nostalgia—it is the process of letting traditional genes continually generate new visual life within every breath of colour and line.