

A Medium of Resistance: Audience Response and Theoretical Dissemination of *The Trend of Art Thought*

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Founded in the 1980s, *The Trend of Art Thought* was a vital carrier of theoretical communication in China's art scene. It responded to internal discussions and theoretical debates in the art world and built a communication platform for a broader community of art practitioners. Centered on the public discursive field constructed by the magazine to communicate with its readers, this paper systematically sorts out the composition and characteristics of its audience. Meanwhile, from the two dimensions of builder of the new trend discursive field and pioneer of media resistance, it analyzes the core role of the magazine in the communication of contemporary Chinese art, reveals its important function in promoting the development of art theory, the innovation of Chinese painting, and the "85 New Wave" Art Movement, and provides an important perspective for studying the transformation of China's art world and social trends in the 1980s.

Keywords: *The Trend of Art Thought*, theoretical dissemination, audience response, the "85 New Wave" Art Movement

Introduction

The 1980s was a critical period of ideological liberation and cultural revival in China. With the massive influx of Western modern art theories and trends, the Chinese art world was undergoing profound conceptual changes and practical explorations. The rise of the "85 New Wave" Art Movement further boosted the development of contemporary Chinese art. Against this historical backdrop, *The Trend of Art Thought* released its trial issue in late 1984 and was officially founded in February 1985. Sponsored by the Hubei Federation of Literary and Art Circles and edited by Peng De, it was one of the "two journals and one newspaper" (*The Trend of Art Thought*, *Jiangsu Pictorial*, *China Art News*) in China's art scene at that time, and also an important pioneer platform carrying art theoretical communication and promoting ideological debates.

Analysis of Audience Response and Criticism in the Trend of Art Thought

European and American magazines often set up reader columns, allowing readers and editors to communicate freely. With the introduction of Western modern editorial theories and paradigms, interaction between editors and readers also became common in Chinese newspapers and periodicals. The interactive history of *The Trend of Art Thought* with its readers embodied this model. From its inception, the magazine established an open interaction mechanism, set up a contribution system and reader exchange columns, actively solicited readers' opinions, and enabled readers to participate in content generation, forming a virtuous cycle of two-way

discussions on art and culture between editors and readers. This interaction not only enriched the magazine's content but also profoundly influenced its development direction.

Composition and Characteristics of the Readership

Since its founding, *The Trend of Art Thought* has clearly defined its target readership: "The Trend of Art Thought will seek readers and contributors among young people, especially students in art academies" (Peng, 1985, p. 2). That is, young artists and art academy students with a keen interest in art trends. This positioning of readers and contributors aligned with the increasingly open ideological atmosphere and the pursuit of new things in Chinese society at that time, especially amid the cultural trends of "cultural fever" and "philosophical fever". The avant-garde, youth-oriented, non-celebrity, and non-regional nature of the magazine's content reflected the editorial department's sensitive grasp of the times and precise prediction of art reforms.

来信摘要

《美术思潮》第一期收到了，匆匆阅读一遍，顿觉耳目一新。论文大都有创见，触及了当前美术创作和理论研究的新情况和新问题，但不够生动活泼。在编辑工作中，应注意改正不通的语汇，同时要尽量消灭错别字。

中国美术馆 陈伯萍

看了一、二期不少文章，感到新鲜，而且使人兴奋：人类今天处在高度发展科学的现代化的新时代，当然要出现新的美术思潮和新的创作。我看后，感到生活中不能缺少这一刊物。

美协广西分会 涂克

从第一期看，切中时弊的文章较多，有理论深度的文章较少。要在美术界争得一席之地，在保持前一特色的基础上，后一方面应加强。

武汉大学 程亚林

我认为，一个以推倒现存教条、建立新理论为己任的美术理论刊物，在文章选择上就必须是多元的艺术观和强烈的前卫倾向的统一。多元性应建立在这样的层次上，即它能真正反映我们时代的理论水准而不是陈旧理论在名词上的翻新。对具有开拓性格的读者群来说，一篇不甚严谨但却富有创造活力的文章会比一篇周详完备的老生常谈更有吸引力。

邵阳师专 黄一

我参加近几年文化部召开的理论研究会，大家都深感我国的艺术史论相当薄弱，不能适应新时代发展的需要，理论落后于创作，创作的发展也受局限；但是我国并非没有理论人才，只是没有一种良好的条件，缺乏必要的园地。

我很赞赏贵刊的宗旨，希望根绝不正之风，真心大力扶持理论新苗新秀，绝不能单纯拜“名人”，更不能靠“关系”照顾版面。真正以质来取文；当然，“质量”也是相对的；绝不能以编辑个人的爱好、观点来取舍。

中央工艺美院 胡照华

Figure 1. Selected letters (*The Trend of Art Thought*, 1985, No. 2, p. 23).

读者来信

陈尊三

编辑同志：

您好！顷读《美术思潮》86年双月刊第1期中理论探讨文章《现代艺术——模糊化的民族性与多样化的个性》后，感到作者在历史知识方面出现了一个失误：他把鲁迅先生、郭沫若、陈独秀都当成了提出“民族主义”口号的文学家了。

在第10页右排第10行中，作者写道：“……这种时刻，民族主义的口号喊得最为响亮的作家鲁迅、郭沫若、陈独秀等……”其实，鲁迅先生不但不是主张“民族主义”的作家，正相反，他是“民族主义文学”这个为帝国主义效劳的反动派别的死对头。只要翻开《二心集》中《“民族主义文学”的任务和命运》一文读一读就一目了然了。

我们不妨引用几段鲁迅先生的原文，看看他是怎样无穷地揭露“民族主义文学”的反动实质的：

“那些宠犬派文学之中，锣鼓敲得最起劲的是所谓‘民族主义文学’。”

接着分析这帮原来就是专门“写花月、圣地、失眠、酒、女人”的漂浮于上海滩上的“流尸”，“一到旧社会的崩溃愈加分明，阶级的斗争愈加锋利的时候，他们也就看见了自己的死敌，将创造新的文化、一扫旧来的污秽的无产阶级，并且觉到了自己就是这污秽，将与在上的统治者同其命运，于是就必然漂集于帝国主义所宰制的民族中的顺民所竖起的‘民族主义文学’的旗帜之下，来和主人一同做一回最后的挣扎了。”

这一段话再清楚不过说明了“民族主义

Figure 2. Letters from readers (*The Trend of Art Thought*, 1986, No. 3, p. 25).

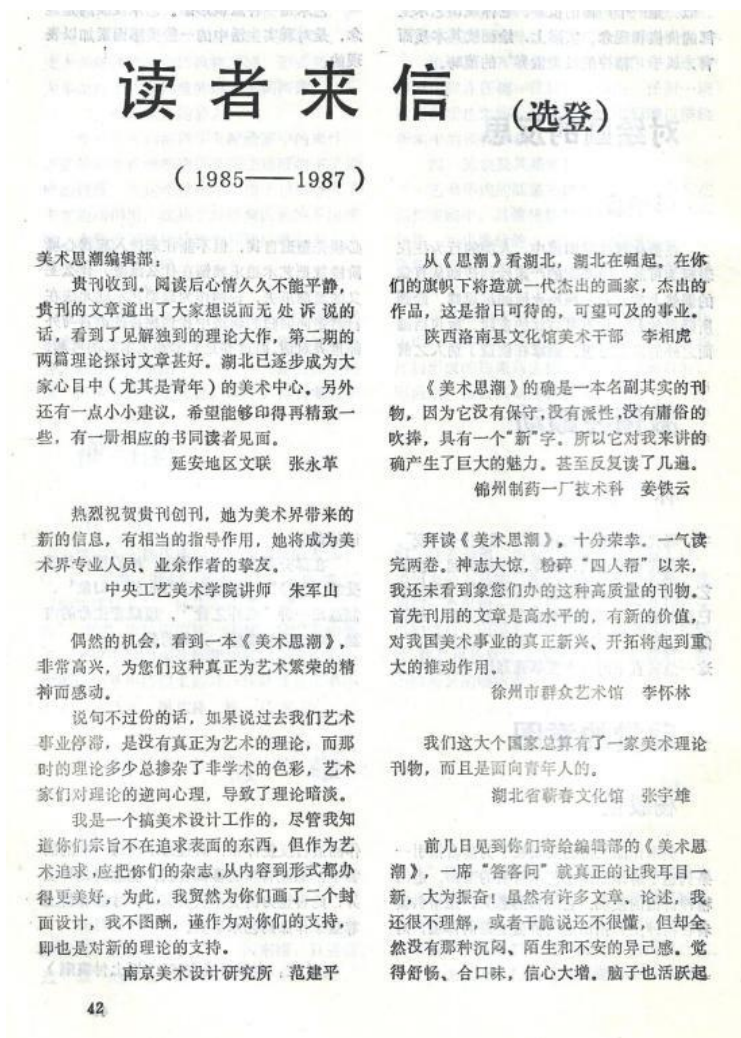


Figure 3. Letters from readers (selected 1985-1987) (*The Trend of Art Thought*, 1987, No. 6, p. 42).

The readership of the magazine had the following distinctive characteristics: First, youthfulness was its core feature, closely linked to the magazine's positioning and reflecting its emphasis on emerging artists and ideas. Second was professionalism: Readers generally had professional academic backgrounds, indicating their profound interest in art and their understanding and pursuit of the professional field of fine arts. In addition, this group was ideologically active, open to new trends and forms of expression, and willing to explore and accept new artistic concepts. Readers not only had a clear interest in artistic innovation but also possessed critical thinking, willing to conduct in-depth reflection and criticism of traditional artistic phenomena. This critical thinking and sensitivity to new trends made the readership of *The Trend of Art Thought* play an important role in the development of art theory and practice. Meanwhile, the magazine's non-regional influence attracted readers interested in contemporary art from all over the country and even internationally, encouraged readers to participate in discussions, and provided a platform for artists to exchange ideas with peers. This interactive communication mode greatly enhanced readers' sense of participation and creative motivation. The diversity of the magazine's content also met the needs of readers with different artistic interests and research directions, contributing to the formation of a diversified readership network.

The column setup of *The Trend of Art Thought* demonstrates the magazine's emphasis on reader feedback. Whether it was "Selected Letters" (Figure 1), "Reader Letters" (Figure 2), or the later "Reader Letters (Selected 1985-1987)" (Figure 3), these columns provided a voice platform for people of different identities and backgrounds to participate in discussions on art trends. This interaction not only enhanced the vitality of the magazine but also promoted the development and progress of the art field. Through reader feedback, the editorial department could timely understand readers' interests and needs, and then adjust and optimize the magazine's content. At the same time, reader participation brought more creativity and inspiration to the magazine, promoting exchanges and cooperation in the art world.

The readership of *The Trend of Art Thought* not only formed the foundation of its social influence but also actively promoted the art world through professional backgrounds, active thinking, and innovative awareness. By publishing content with critical thinking and forward-looking perspectives, the magazine successfully attracted a group of readers with profound understanding and unique insights into art, who played an indispensable role in the development of art theory and practice. The characteristics of the readership of this art magazine and its impact on the art world provide an important perspective for studying the transformation of China's art world and social trends in the 1980s.

Types and Characteristics of Audience Response

The audience response to *The Trend of Art Thought* presented diverse types and characteristics. These responses not only reflected the compositional features of the readership but also mirrored the dynamics and demands of the art world against the social and cultural background at that time.

Positive response and support. Many readers of the magazine showed great interest and support for the novel art theories and criticisms provided by *The Trend of Art Thought*. Young artists and students, in particular, were in the stage of artistic exploration and ideological maturity, and strongly identified with the innovative consciousness and critical thinking advocated in the magazine. This positive response promoted the art world's acceptance and discussion of new trends, and advanced the development of art theory and practice. The final issue of *The Trend of Art Thought* selected reader letters from 1985 to 1987, most of which were praises for the magazine. The second issue of *The Trend of Art Thought* launched the "Selected Letters" column, featuring short reviews from the National Art Museum of China, Guangxi Branch of the Chinese Artists Association, Wuhan University, etc., mainly offering congratulations on the founding of *The Trend of Art Thought* and objective suggestions. For example, Chen Boping commented:

I have received the first issue of *The Trend of Art Thought*. After a quick read, I find it refreshing. Most papers have original ideas and touch on new situations and issues in current art creation and theoretical research, but they are not lively enough. In editing, attention should be paid to correcting awkward expressions and eliminating typos. (Chen, 1985, p. 23)

Critical participation. Many readers with critical thinking not only absorbed the magazine's content but also actively participated in art criticism and discussions. Their critical responses were reflected in questioning existing artistic phenomena, conducting in-depth analyses of new art schools, and refuting some viewpoints in the magazine. This interaction enhanced the vitality of the art world and the diversity of theories. As *The Trend of Art Thought* advocated independent viewpoints and freedom of speech, some viewpoints and discussions triggered extensive controversies among readers. These controversies involved multiple levels such as the forms of artistic expression, social functions, and the relationship between art and society, reflecting the diversity and complexity within the art world.

Academic discussion. The readership of *The Trend of Art Thought* included professional art theorists and scholars, whose responses were often academic in nature. By writing academic papers and participating in seminars and forums, these readers took the magazine's content as the basis for research and discussion, promoting the in-depth development of art theory and criticism.

Inspiration for creative creation. Cutting-edge theories and critical articles in the magazine inspired many artists' creative ideas. Readers learned the latest art trends and thoughts through the magazine, and these information became materials and sources of inspiration for their artistic creation. Among the readers of the magazine, artists applied the knowledge and inspiration gained from the magazine to their own artistic creation, realizing the transformation from theory to practice.

Education and enlightenment. For students in art academies, the magazine played a role in education and enlightenment. Student readers learned about the latest developments in the art world and studied art theories and critical methods through the magazine, laying a solid foundation for their art study and future careers.

The audience responses to *The Trend of Art Thought* were diverse and distinctive, ranging from active support to critical participation, from academic discussions to creative practice. Together, these responses painted a rich and colorful picture of China's art world in the 1980s. As an important platform for art theory and criticism, the magazine had a profound impact on the art world at that time. The responses and interactions of its readership were the key to understanding the artistic development and social and cultural changes of that era.

Audience Response to a Specific Event—A Case Study of the 6th National Art Exhibition

This paper takes the reports, reviews, and theoretical discussions on the 6th National Art Exhibition in *The Trend of Art Thought* as examples to analyze the audience response to a specific event, which further highlights the editorial department's emphasis on audience feedback.

■ 第六届全国美展金牌获得者谈创作		
13	骑驴找驴——创作思迹摘	陈绍华
14	我画《未来世界》	王晓明
15	探求与思考	晁楣
17	雕塑的造型、视觉关系和形式	杨冬白
19	宣传画与时代	郭线庐

Figure 4. Gold medal winners of the 6th National Art Exhibition on their creation (*The Trend of Art Thought*, 1985, No. 3, table of contents page).

In 1985, the magazine published three consecutive issues (Issues 3, 4 and 5 of *The Trend of Art Thought* 1985) introducing the gold medal winners of the 6th National Art Exhibition and their creative concepts (Figure 4), aiming to provide readers with a deeper understanding of the exhibition and the stories behind the award-winning works. However, this practice also aroused dissatisfaction and criticism from some radical painters, reflecting the complexity of audience response. After the publication of these three issues, Editor-in-Chief Peng De received an anonymous letter from Beijing. The three consecutive issues featuring gold medal-winning artists may have been regarded by some radical painters as an excessive tilt toward mainstream art and official recognition, thus triggering their resentment.

【理论探讨】		21 刘继潮 从画家的视觉感受谈起
1 皮道坚 我的批评观		23 王洪义 画什么与怎样画
4 鲁 萌 方法·空白·中介		
8 墨哲兰 在返回感觉之根的途中 解柯尔维尔不可言说的焦虑		【最新信息】
14 贾方洲 艺术的商品化和商品的艺术化		25 美国维罗斯科教授在浙江美院举办讲座
【第六届全国美展评议】		4 《红黄兰画刊》即将创刊
17 孙 永 艺术权威与艺术价值		26 广州美院师生成立学术研究会
18 饶 夫 失望与希望		26 “北方青年艺术群体”建立
19 王广义 传统、时代与观念的更新		4 湖北美术出版社成立
20 张德泉 中国画新潮的动力		22 浙江筹办《85'新空间》展
		27 【近期美术新论一览】 松 实摘编

Figure 5. Reviews of the 6th National Art Exhibition (*The Trend of Art Thought*, 1985, No. 2, table of contents page).

Nevertheless, a review of the magazine's content prior to these three issues reveals that *The Trend of Art Thought* had already published reviews of the 6th National Art Exhibition in Issues 1 and 2 of 1985, all of which were critical of the exhibition. For instance, the Central Academy of Fine Arts explored the “doctrine of subject-matter determinism” in the 6th National Art Exhibition. In Issue 2 of *The Trend of Art Thought* 1985, a special column titled “Reviews of the 6th National Art Exhibition” (Figure 5) was set up, containing six articles with sharp criticism of the exhibition. In his article “Art Authority and Art Value”, Sun Yong expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of the exhibited works, arguing that many works were of low artistic level and plagued by problems such as conceptualization, formalism, false beautification of reality, natural imitation, historical illustration, physical display, and plagiarism. Few works were truly inspiring, thought-provoking, and impressive; visiting the exhibition felt more like attending a political class or a situation report than an art exhibition. The dominance of the exhibition remained in the hands of a few authorities, most of whom had experienced the turbulent period and failed to keep pace with the times, clinging to outdated understandings of art. This power structure formed a “barrier” that threatened artists with pursuits and the courage to break through (Sun, 1985, p. 17). Sun Yong criticized the selection mechanism controlled by authorities as unreasonable and unfair, leading to the neglect of many talented artists and their works. He also noted that due to this mechanism, some artists had to abandon their artistic pursuits and create works catering to the tastes of authorities in exchange for recognition and exhibition opportunities—a motivation and creative attitude detrimental to the development of art.

In fact, criticizing the 6th National Art Exhibition had become a form of “political correctness” with special significance at that time. Gao Minglu once stated: “After the 6th National Art Exhibition, there seemed to be a widespread rebellious mentality of ‘opposing whatever the 6th National Art Exhibition advocates’” (Gao et al., 1991, p. 59). Therefore, against this context, *The Trend of Art Thought*'s decision to publish three issues of gold medalists talking about their creation after two issues of critical reviews was deliberate. Although Editor-in-Chief Peng De mentioned in an interview that the column on gold medalists' creation talks was adopted due to a shortage of contributed manuscripts, this paper argues that after two consecutive issues of critical reviews, the magazine's coverage of gold medalists' creation talks was likely to balance the reporting perspective and provide a comprehensive dialectical view. This reporting strategy not only reflects the magazine's concern for artistic quality but also demonstrates its profound critique of the current situation in the art world.

The Role of *The Trend of Art Thought* in the Communication of Contemporary Chinese Art

The Trend of Art Thought played a crucial role in the communication of contemporary art, mainly in the following two aspects:

First, as an important art theoretical journal, *The Trend of Art Thought* acted as a builder of the discursive field of new art trends. By putting forward artistic trend concepts, creative ideas, and aesthetic viewpoints, it inspired artists' creative inspiration and promoted the continuous development and progress of art. As an important carrier of academic exchanges and knowledge dissemination, the magazine provided rich materials for scholars and researchers in art-related fields, promoted the spread of academic exchanges and research results, and advanced the in-depth discussion of art theory. By introducing and analyzing different art forms, *The Trend of Art Thought* offered important textbooks and reference materials for art education, helping students and art lovers deeply understand art styles and trends of different periods and cultivating their ability to appreciate art and aesthetic taste.

Second, *The Trend of Art Thought* also played the role of a "medium of resistance". In the media communication of the "85 New Wave" Art Movement, the discussion on the innovation of Chinese painting was the most intense, and its communication also followed this rule. As a pioneer in this field, *The Trend of Art Thought* constructed a horizon of resistance, allowing participants to express views contrary to the official ones, so as to innovate traditional art and disseminate contemporary art.

Builder of the Discursive Field of New Art Trends

The rise of magazines and newspapers such as *The Trend of Art Thought*, *Jiangsu Pictorial*, and *China Art News* in China's art world in the 1980s marked the formation of an important art discourse platform. As the main force in constructing this discursive field, *The Trend of Art Thought* not only promoted the diversification of art theory but also advanced the development of art criticism, stimulated dialogues and debates in the art world, recorded and reflected the artistic phenomena at that time, and played a key role in constructing the discourse system of Chinese fine arts.

First, the magazine's introduction of Western art theories, though uneven in content, became an important channel for cultural expression pursuing spiritual freedom under the specific historical context. This introduction promoted the liberation of artistic thought to a certain extent and provided a space for exploration and experimentation for local artists and theorists. Second, by setting up columns such as "Theoretical Discussion" and "Debate", *The Trend of Art Thought* focused on and discussed the new trend art movement, stimulating dialogues and debates in the art world. These discussions involved multiple levels such as the nature of the new trend art as a "movement", the relationship between social utilitarianism and artistry, and the integration of philosophy and fine arts, reflecting the in-depth observation, judgment, and description of the new trend art by the critics.

In addition, *The Trend of Art Thought* recorded the representative artistic phenomenon of "new trend art" in the mid-1980s. By publishing articles, debates, and manifestos by artists and critics, it highlighted the "85 New Wave" Art Movement's emphasis and reliance on theory. The editorial team of the magazine, whose members are now outstanding figures active in the art world, also reflects the magazine's influence and important position in the art world from the side. Against the background of globalization and the collision of multiculturalism, *The Trend of Art Thought* participated in the discussion of constructing the discourse system of Chinese fine arts and

emphasized the importance of deepening the construction of Chinese cultural subject consciousness in a cross-cultural context. The construction of this subject consciousness was not only a critique of Western centralism but also a reflection of Oriental centralism, aiming to establish a broader cultural vision.

Through its editorial strategy and content selection, *The Trend of Art Thought* became an indispensable discourse platform in China's art world in the 1980s, exerting a profound influence on art criticism, theoretical development, and cultural dialogue at that time.

Pioneer of Media Resistance

In the "85 New Wave" Art Movement, the discussion on the innovation of Chinese painting was a core issue. This discussion was not limited to the interior of artistic creation but also extensively touched the social and cultural level. Against this background, *The Trend of Art Thought*, with its unique perspective and keen insight, became an important voice platform for this art movement.

As a traditional Chinese painting form, Chinese painting has formed its techniques, themes, composition, and other elements through the precipitation of time. With social changes and cultural integration, Chinese painting has faced the pressure and challenge of innovation. In this context, artists and theorists in the "85 New Wave" Art Movement began to explore the modern transformation of Chinese painting, trying to integrate new elements and concepts while inheriting traditions to resonate with contemporary society. However, despite the needs of social changes, the authorities still did not want the reform of Chinese painting to move too fast. Therefore, *The Trend of Art Thought* acted as a medium confronting the official stance.

James W. Carey's "ritual view of communication" provides a strong theoretical support for understanding the role of *The Trend of Art Thought* in promoting the innovation of Chinese painting. According to Carey's theory, communication is not only the transmission of information but also a cultural and social practice that maintains and creates a common social reality through ritual processes. Under this framework, *The Trend of Art Thought* was not only a platform for information exchange but also a place for cultural rituals. It promoted the formation of public dialogue and collective identity on the innovation of Chinese painting by publishing different voices, theories, and criticisms. Every article, interview, and discussion in the magazine continuously constructed and reshaped a common world about the innovation of Chinese painting. This world was both a reflection of reality and an expectation and imagination for the future. In this world, different voices and viewpoints converged and collided.

Li Xiaoshan published the article "My View on Contemporary Chinese Painting" in *Jiangsu Pictorial*, putting forward the viewpoint that "Chinese painting has reached a dead end", which triggered fierce discussions in the art world at that time. Meanwhile, avant-garde ink artists represented by Gu Wenda made innovative impacts on traditional Chinese painting. As a new trend medium, *The Trend of Art Thought* participated in this debate on the current situation and future of Chinese painting. In its trial issue, Lu Hong's article "What to Absorb from Western Painting" began to explore the influence of Western art on Chinese painting. After the publication of Li Xiaoshan's "My View on Contemporary Chinese Painting", *The Trend of Art Thought* actively invited him to contribute and published "The Premise for the Existence of Chinese Painting", further promoting the discussion on the current situation of Chinese painting. Later, the magazine set up a column to conduct written discussions on Chinese painting after the "Invitation Exhibition of New Chinese Painting Works", continuously publishing articles on the reform of Chinese painting and exploring the current situation of Chinese painting and the relationship between tradition and innovation.

The publication of these discussions and articles showed *The Trend of Art Thought's* active participation in promoting the debate between tradition and innovation. Articles in the magazine emphasized the urgency and necessity of reform, arguing that the old theoretical system and rigid understanding of art should be abandoned, and Chinese painting should be completely innovated conceptually. The importance of Li Xiaoshan's article lies in that it directly faced the current situation of the Chinese painting circle at that time, revealing the problems behind the "letting a hundred flowers bloom", that is, Chinese painting had developed into a formalistic stage lacking rationality and spirituality.

By publishing challenging and enlightening articles, *The Trend of Art Thought* provided a platform for artists and critics to express and discuss, promoting profound reflection on the current situation of Chinese painting and extensive discussion on its future direction. In this way, the magazine not only recorded the artistic debates at that time but also became an important force driving artistic reform and cultural progress, forming a diverse and complex discursive field. The formation of this discursive field was also the process of shaping the role of "medium of resistance". In the context of media inequality, the editors and authors of *The Trend of Art Thought* played the role of a "medium of resistance". Relying on their professional knowledge and keen social insight, they effectively attracted media attention and expanded their influence through consensus mobilization, action mobilization, and social mobilization. This expansion of influence not only enhanced the social influence of *The Trend of Art Thought* but also provided a freer platform for discussions on Chinese art.

Conclusion

In the process of coexistence of resistance and compromise, and interweaving of structure and deconstruction, *The Trend of Art Thought* constructed a vibrant and creative art world. This world not only provided a space for participants to express different views but also offered a platform for traditional art innovation and contemporary art communication. On this platform, old and new ideas blended, and Eastern and Western art dialogued, thus promoting the in-depth development of Chinese painting innovation. *The Trend of Art Thought* played a pivotal role in the communication of contemporary art. It not only promoted the development of contemporary art but also facilitated exchanges between artists and audiences. Its emergence brought new vitality and vigor to the contemporary art world and more possibilities for the future of Chinese art.

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