



Cloud-Infused Artistry: Unraveling the Enigmatic Bond Between Destiny and Oil Painting

Huaqi Liu*

Leroy E. Hoffberger School of Painting, Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, 21217-4191, United States

Correspondence Author's Email: huaqiliu97@gmail.com

Abstract. This study investigates the intricate relationship between the Chinese character symbolising ‘destiny’ and its fusion with the representation of clouds, elucidating a profound connection between the ethereal concept of fate and the natural world. Through an exploration of abstraction (destiny) and tangibility (cloud), this research unveils the subtle interplay between the uncertainties inherent in individual lives and the deterministic undercurrents of destiny. Through oil painting, the research seeks to capture the elusive forces shaping human existence, transcending visible elements to reveal those that define our being. Drawing from Chinese cultural history, contemporary Western art, this inquiry spans literature, art history, and cultural domains. It examines the dynamic interplay between fate and individuals, probing whether this interaction signifies destiny’s certainty amid individual unpredictability. Additionally, it contemplates environmental, societal, and cultural shifts’ impact on personal destinies, reflecting evolving perspectives. Employing oil painting, the research aims to create artworks that convey the complexity of human existence, encouraging viewers to contemplate their lives and future paths. By examining cultural, personal, and environmental influences on fate, it encourages deep reflections on societal issues and human experiences. Ultimately, this study acts as a catalyst for exploring artworks’ roles in contemporary society, offering insights into societal development and fostering individual introspection.

Keywords: Clouds, Destiny, Uncertainty, Determinism, Environment, Artistic Reflections

1 Introduction

The Chinese character for ‘Destiny’ intricately integrates the symbol for ‘Cloud’, a seemingly unlikely but intriguing association, indicating the fascinating correlation between destiny and clouds, bridging the metaphysical realms of human fate with the natural world. Through an exploration of both the abstract and the tangible, this work aims to illuminate the subtle interplay between the uncertainties of individual lives and the deterministic undercurrents of destiny. The medium of oil painting serves as a canvas to portray this enigmatic relationship, capturing the essence of the invisible forces

shaping our existence. This study focuses on the combination of the Chinese characters ‘destiny’ and ‘cloud’ in Chinese cultural history, suggesting the interaction between the uncertainty of individual life and the certainty of fate. Background information includes the symbolic meaning of cloud in Chinese culture, contemporary art, Western art history, and painting, which mainly involves literature, art history, Chinese culture, Western art history, oil painting creations, and contemporary artworks.

This article poses the following questions: What is the interaction between fate and the individual, and does the interaction mean the determinateness of fate and the indeterminateness of the individual? Is the symbolic meaning of the cloud destiny? After the audience appreciates the artworks of clouds, can they trigger thinking and participate in the future of art? Does the change of the environment (not only the natural environment), such as shifts in climate, population migration, experiential alterations, societal transformation, and cultural evolution, influence an individual’s fate in varied contexts? Additionally, has society’s focus on environmental sustainability changed people’s outlook on the future?

The specific theme of the study is to explore the relationship between destiny and the clouds, to reveal the mysterious and subtle interaction between individual uncertainty and fate determinism, through the medium of abstraction and concreteness of oil painting. What this study seeks to achieve is to explore the effects of social change, cultural change, and environmental change on the fate of individuals. This research contemplates how these factors manifest in literature, painting, and the arts, and how individuals may navigate their roles amidst these transformations. The significance of this research lies in: through the creation of oil paintings and the study of contemporary art, examining the impact of social changes and environmental changes on the fate of individuals, as well as how people’s views on the future are affected by these changes, contributes to a deeper reflection on social issues, and how viewers can have profound thinking and aesthetic experience when appreciating artworks. In the future, works of art may serve as prophecies and warnings for human and social development.

2 Destiny and clouds: a shared essence

What constitutes destiny? In the *I Ching* (Classics of Ancient China), also known as The Book of Changes, destiny is the subject of metaphysical study and remains shrouded in mystery. The book explains that the destinies of human beings, much like every other element of the universe, are bound by laws. We possess imagination, creativity, and action, and use these qualities to observe the mysterious forces of destiny and explore its laws. Every element, such as the time and place of birth, genetic inheritance, familial milieu, and educational upbringing—shapes an individual’s cognition and capabilities. In Sarah E. Lantz and Sagarika Ray’s elucidation in the National Library of Medicine (Lantz and Ray, 2022), psychologist Sigmund Freud’s developmental theory stipulates that between the ages of 0 and 1, during the oral stage, unmet oral needs from the mother may incite subsequent aggressive or passive tendencies (Lantz and Ray, 2022). The passive formation of character during an individual’s unconscious period embodies the determinateness of fate, an aspect believed unalterable. Drawing

from the same database, William J. Chopik and Shinobu Kitayama's research '*Personality Change Across the Lifespan: Insights from a Cross-Cultural Longitudinal Study*' explores personality trajectory and posits that 'personality change is influenced by engagement in social roles like work, family, religion, and volunteering, potentially varying across diverse cultural and social contexts' (Chopik and Kitayama, 2018). Consequently, when individuals enter new environments, resultant alterations signify the uncertainty of fate. Much like individuals, clouds emerge in diverse environments, times, and climates, exhibiting distinct shapes, colors, and weather patterns that evolve with movement and eventually dissipate—resembling the transient nature of destiny.

I propose that destiny embodies the synthesis of necessity and contingency, certainty and uncertainty. While certain aspects of an individual's character and life prospects are predetermined at birth, life experiences prompt alterations as we traverse life's contingencies, thereby reshaping our destinies. It is this intricate intertwining of the inevitable and the fortuitous that captivates my interest. Moreover, life inherently unfolds within a social fabric. The communities in which we are situated contribute significantly to our formation. Hence, I posit that destiny serves as a conduit—a bridge connecting the individual to the broader world, embodying a channel for communication and interaction.

3 Metaphor through oil painting

Why did I choose 'clouds' as a metaphor for 'destiny'? "Playing with Clouds" (Frugoni, 2011) delves into the symbolic significance of clouds in art history and culture, referencing ancient texts and providing explanations of diverse cloud forms. Frugoni describes clouds as dynamic and emotionally charged natural phenomena, suggesting they are akin to 'faces perceived in the clouds'. Their ever-changing shapes and emotional resonance make them untouchable, devoid of fixed forms, adapting to the current environment, evoking emotions in observers. As an artist, I mirror human emotions and feelings about clouds in my work, endeavouring through oil paintings to express the intricacies of individual fate and its intricate relationship with deterministic destiny.

The Chinese character for 'Destiny' intertwines with the 'Cloud' symbol, establishing a remarkable analogy between seemingly dissimilar entities. This unique relationship draws a fascinating parallel, similar to an anonymous article in *The Art Amateur* discussing the symbolism of religious symbols in art history, suggesting that symbols resonate more profoundly when they evoke deep contemplation. In "Weather as a Medium: Art and Meteorological Science" by Janine Randerson, Jennifer Salmond, and Chris Manford, the authors explore the cloud's role as a medium in both the arts and sciences. Using air pollution data, integrating weather sensors into art installations, and encouraging community involvement, their work aims to personalise data in contrast to statistical approaches, fostering deeper connections.

"Cloud(s)" transform into a metonym for "destiny," encoding this abstract, philosophical notion within a tangible, experiential image. Just as destiny is influenced by unseen forces, the lives of clouds are guided by the wind and weather. I find parallel qualities in clouds and in individuals: both are products of nature and the universe, and

their destinies share many similar qualities: uncertainty, variability, diversity, infiniteness, and naturalness. According to the observation and experience of the causes of cloud, human beings can judge and predict the operation law and the way of existence of cloud, just like the destiny of individuals can also be judged and predicted. At the same time, as time passes and the environment changes, so does the destiny of individuals and clouds. In my oil paintings, **I express the mystery and fantasy between the uncertainty of the individual and deterministic destiny by describing the characteristics of clouds in different moments and environments.**

Diversity is a characteristic shared by both clouds and individuals, and it manifests in various forms and expressions. In the artistic realm of my oil paintings, I meticulously capture the enigmatic interplay between the uncertainty inherent in individual existence and the deterministic trajectories of destiny by rendering the diverse qualities of clouds across multifarious settings. The portrayal of clouds in my artworks seeks to evoke a gamut of visual experiences, where cloud formations, akin to dragons soaring through celestial realms or resembling mountains and thin lines, converge to manifest a distinct spatiality and depth. The variety in cloud shapes serves as a testament to the nuanced interplay between the present moment, environment, and temporal elements. Similarly, the depiction of these cloud formations is symbolic of the transformative nature of the mind amidst differing circumstances, mirroring the relentless evolution of clouds, unimpeded by immutable fate, as time and environment remain in perpetual flux. So, in particular, I perceive that the shape and expression of the cloud are feedbacks to the present moment, environment and time, also using the description of the shape of the cloud to express the individual fate in different circumstances of the mind is changed, just like the cloud, it has no way to interfere with fate because the time and environment will not stop changing.

Uncertainty, an intrinsic characteristic of both clouds and the concept of fate, epitomises a formidable challenge in their prediction and control. This uncertainty is masterfully reflected in my artistic portrayal of cloud colours across varied environmental contexts and temporal dimensions. Employing a palette infused with shades of grey, akin to Morandi's colour aesthetics, I articulate the clouds with a single degree of grey, juxtaposed against varying degrees of a deep yellow sky. This amalgamation engenders an unpredictable array of new hues, thereby affording spectators the liberty to interpret and imbibe diverse emotions evoked by these amalgamated shades, resonating with their unique experiences, historical background, and cultural vantage points. Additionally, I explore the convergence of grey-violet and grey-blue tones, entwined within the same colour family as the sky, effectively obfuscating the boundaries between sky and cloud. In this blurred boundary, clouds become astoundingly nimble, akin to sky-bound athletes navigating an infinite expanse. The endeavour to comprehend the uncertainty of destiny is analogous to the evanescent nature of recalling the exact colour of a fleeting cloud.

Infinity stands as a fundamental attribute entwined within both the essence of clouds and the enigmatic concept of fate. In my artistic journey with oil painting, I meticulously embark upon an exploration of the diverse potential conveyed through a nuanced manipulation of brushstrokes. This endeavour is marked by a deliberate orchestration employing a myriad of oil brushes, each tailored to elicit distinct strokes on the canvas.

For instance, in a specific composition that fuses tones of greyish brown, green, and yellow, I deliberately employed small, rigid oil brushes to generate a profusion of visible, substantial strokes within the brighter section of the cloud. These deliberate strokes were aimed at articulating the density and corporeality of the cloud formation. In contrast, the lower expanse of the cloud was rendered with a smaller, softer brush to mitigate the prominence of the brush marks, thus evoking a representation of a more ethereal, wispy cloud. This juxtaposition of pronounced and delicate brushwork cultivates an illusion of spatial depth, fostering a perception of the cloud's continuum and its semblance of infinite expanse. Similarly, in another artwork predominantly infused with hues of orange and yellow, I commenced by saturating the canvas with an abundance of oil medium, invoking a liquid-like visage. Subsequently, I employed a large oil wool brush to diffuse the background, resembling the fluidity of water. The subsequent depiction of clouds using brushes of varying sizes mirrors the fluid droplets of water, cascading across the canvas. The strokes traverse freely, appearing unrestrained and imbued with an innate flexibility that seems to transcend spatial limitations. This seamless flow of strokes mirrors the boundless nature of water, culminating in an artistic endeavour that melds rich and diverse brushwork. Through this amalgamation, I endeavour to evoke a semblance of the infinite potentiality and unbounded nature akin to the labyrinthine pathways of fate.

Fickleness, characterised by a continual state of flux and evolution, is an intrinsic quality shared by both clouds and the nebulous concept of fate. It's a concept that hinges on their perpetual adaptation to the ever-shifting circumstances and the relentless march of time. Within the realm of my oil paintings, I embark on an unceasing exploration of diverse material combinations to fashion an assortment of artistic environments akin to the manifold transformations inherent in clouds. This artistic journey involves a meticulous and purposeful divergence from conventional methods, delving into a plethora of painting surfaces, oil mediums, and their amalgamations. Abandoning the customary use of gesso as the base on a wooden surface, I instead employ a deliberate concoction of water and Chinese graphite, bestowing upon the board a saturated milieu. In this moistened environment, the marriage between the red graphite and Chinese rice paper occurs spontaneously. The vivid red hue seeps into the fibres of the paper, engendering a poignant semblance of clouds. The interplay between the intrinsic wetness and the artistic materials not only evokes the ephemeral nature of clouds but also mirrors the transience and adaptability emblematic of fate. Similarly, another artistic expedition unfolds upon a chalkboard painted green, metamorphosed into an experimental canvas. Here, the explorative blend of white chalk and water sets forth a nuanced portrayal of clouds. The application and subsequent removal of the chalk evoke an ethereal portrayal, embodying the essence of transformation akin to the ephemeral yet ever-evolving nature of clouds. Moreover, the lingering vestiges of this experimentation foster a profound contemplation on temporality and evolution. The remarkable aspect of these artistic experiments lies not merely in their visual impact but in the allegory they present. They elucidate the passive yet dynamic evolution ubiquitous in both clouds and the enigmatic path of fate. Through these artistic forays into diverse material combinations and techniques, an astonishing array of reactions unfolds, resonating with the ca-

precious and transformative nature of clouds and the perpetually shifting tides of destiny. In essence, these artistic endeavours mirror the very essence of fickleness. They capture the essence of adaptation and transformation, symbolising the dynamic interplay between the mutable nature of clouds and the ceaseless evolution intrinsic to the concept of fate. The artworks become a testament to the continuum of change, inviting viewers to contemplate the ephemeral yet wondrous transformations inherent in both clouds and the course of destiny.

4 Cultural and personal influences

Is one's fate influenced by environmental circumstances? How do individuals engage with artistic works? Thomas Munro's scholarly investigation in "Suggestion and Symbolism in Art," published in the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, dissects the implications of semiotics in the audience's relationship with art. Munro posits that the consistent juxtaposition of ideas within an individual's or group's experience strengthens mental connections (Munro, 1956). An individual, carrying a tapestry of culture, education, environment, and personal experience, can articulate these nuances within artwork, fostering resonance with the audience. On a personal level, shifts in the environment subtly alter cognitive perspectives, facilitating a deeper resonance with my artistic creations.

Nature intertwines with both clouds and the concept of fate, encompassing elements beyond human manipulation. Each of my oil paintings is intricately interwoven with my cultural heritage, fostering an indelible connection to my background, culture, and personal journey. Hailing from China, I inherently assimilate aspects of Chinese culture into my artistic expression, blending classical and realistic oil painting techniques acquired from my upbringing. Moreover, my exposure to classical and realistic oil painting techniques permeates my current oeuvre. My familial association with calligraphy—my father being a calligrapher—has equipped me with diverse calligraphic skills, profoundly influencing my adeptness with the oil brush. For instance, in one composition, utilising varying shades of yellow and brown to portray clouds against a navy blue backdrop, I draw upon the hues reminiscent of classical oil paintings, fostering an aura reminiscent of antiquity. In another extensive piece, I apply Chinese black and red ink on a damp cotton canvas frame, employing a Chinese brush technique to evoke the essence of traditional Chinese landscape painting, a tangible embodiment of my cultural heritage. Similarly, an oil painting rendered solely in yellow and blue captures the technique of seamless strokes—a hallmark of Chinese calligraphy—used in portraying clouds. As I wield the oil brush, an amalgamation of inherent abilities and ingrained skills from my upbringing unconsciously infuse my paintings. Rooted in my birthplace, China, a profound comprehension of its cultural nuances perpetuates the inclusion of these distinct Chinese elements—a unique set of conditions and abilities bestowed by fate, immutable and inherently embedded within individuals. This academic analysis posits that the intricate interplay between environmental context, cultural heritage, and inherent skills fundamentally shapes artistic expression, elucidating a deeper connection between the artist, their work, and the audience.

5 Conclusion

This essay culminates by acknowledging the manifold interpretations and symbolic connotations linked to clouds and destiny. Instead of pursuing definitive answers, this exploration serves as a conduit for the artist to immerse themselves within the clouds, providing a novel perspective for comprehending the intricate relationship between individuals and the limitless potential inherent in destiny.

Amidst the tumultuous fabric of society, an individual's endeavour to navigate their environment or societal constraints represents a nuanced resistance against fate, unveiling the intricate and complex tapestry of destiny woven into human life. The artworks reflect the uncertainties of individual existence while also portraying the deterministic aspect of fate, accentuating the enigmatic interplay between the two realms. Utilising the medium of oil painting, I have embarked on a profound contemplation of fate's origins and its formative processes within life. This pursuit has deepened my comprehension of fate and clouds, presenting an avenue to both showcase and inspire audiences towards recognising the intrinsic potency within individual lives. It serves as a catalyst for discovering equilibrium and serenity amidst the interplay of internal and external forces.

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