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ARTISTIC INNOVATION AMONG CHINESE FIGURATIVE EXPRESSIONISTS: THE ROLE OF MOTIVATION, CULTURE, AND EMOTION

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ABSTRACT

Despite the global prominence of Chinese figurative expressionism, the psychological and cultural factors underlying artistic innovation in this genre remain underexplored. This study investigates how intrinsic Motivation, creative Climate, cultural Identity, and openness to Experience influence artistic innovation among Chinese figurative expressionist painters, with emotional Engagement and artistic Flow as mediators. Using a cross-sectional survey, data from 312 Chinese artists were analyzed with Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling. Results show that intrinsic Motivation significantly predicts emotional Engagement ($p < 0.001$), artistic Flow ($p = 0.007$), and innovation ($p = 0.002$). Creative Climate significantly influences emotional Engagement ($p = 0.005$) and artistic Flow ($p < 0.001$) but shows a marginal direct effect on innovation ($p = 0.054$). Cultural Identity significantly predicts emotional Engagement ($p = 0.037$) and innovation ($p = 0.003$) but not Flow ($p = 0.324$). Openness to Experience significantly predicts emotional Engagement ($p = 0.028$), Flow ($p < 0.001$), and innovation ($p = 0.017$). Emotional Engagement ($p = 0.002$) and artistic Flow ($p = 0.001$) directly enhance innovation. Mediation analyses reveal that emotional Engagement mediates the effects of intrinsic Motivation ($p = 0.014$), creative Climate ($p = 0.046$), and cultural Identity ($p = 0.047$) on innovation. Artistic Flow mediates the effects of creative Climate ($p = 0.010$) and openness to Experience ($p = 0.013$) on innovation. These findings highlight the roles of psychological traits, socio-cultural context, and affective states in fostering innovation among Chinese painters and provide a framework for enhancing creativity through intrinsic and contextual factors.

INTRODUCTION

The intersection of psychology, culture, and creative expression has attracted sustained academic interest in the fields of art, aesthetics, and creativity studies (Betzler et al., 2021). Among the diverse genres of visual art, figurative expressionism holds a distinctive place for its ability to combine recognizable forms with intense emotional and symbolic content. Within the Chinese artistic tradition, figurative expressionism has evolved as a rich site of cultural storytelling and aesthetic experimentation, blending traditional motifs with contemporary visual languages (Betzler & Camina, 2020). However, while the global study of artistic creativity has made significant advances, scholarly attention to the psychological and cultural factors driving innovation in Chinese figurative expressionism remains limited (Brand et al., 2021). As contemporary Chinese artists navigate the dual imperatives of cultural preservation and artistic experimentation (Breuer, 2024), there is an urgent need to understand better the personal motivations, environmental conditions, and cultural influences that shape their creative processes. This study responds to that need by exploring how intrinsic Motivation, creative Climate, cultural Identity, and openness to experience contribute to artistic innovation, while examining the roles of emotional Engagement and artistic Flow in this relationship.

Recent theoretical developments have highlighted that creativity in the arts is not merely the outcome of technical proficiency or cognitive skill but emerges through complex interactions between individual psychological traits and socio-cultural environments (Cai et al., 2024). Intrinsic Motivation, defined as the internal drive to engage in activities for personal

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satisfaction rather than external rewards, has consistently been recognized as a central predictor of creative achievement (Centillas et al., 2024). In visual arts practice, intrinsic Motivation sustains the artist's commitment to experimentation and fosters deeper emotional connections to the creative process (Dolese & Kacinik, 2021). Likewise, openness to Experience, a personality trait characterized by curiosity, aesthetic sensitivity, and receptivity to novel ideas, has been linked to artistic exploration and risk-taking behaviors (Fernández, 2025). These individual traits interact with contextual factors such as the creative Climate, the degree to which an environment encourages, supports, and rewards innovative expression and cultural Identity, which informs an artist's values, symbolic choices, and thematic interests (An & Nie, 2023). Despite extensive literature on these factors in Western art contexts, limited empirical research examines how they intersect to influence the psychological and emotional processes underpinning artistic innovation within Chinese figurative expressionism (Gaojie, 2022).

Two key psychological states have been identified as crucial mediators in the creative process: emotional Engagement and artistic Flow. Emotional Engagement reflects the depth of affective involvement and individual experiences during creative activity (Darda et al., 2023). In artistic contexts, this refers to the powerful emotional bond between the artist and their work, often resulting in artworks that are more expressive, authentic, and personally meaningful (Garcia-Lazo et al., 2024). Studies have shown that artists with high emotional Engagement are more likely to pursue unconventional forms of expression and push aesthetic boundaries (Ho et al., 2022). Similarly, artistic Flow, a state of optimal Experience characterized by intense concentration, absorption, and intrinsic enjoyment in an activity, is widely recognized as a condition that fosters creativity (Hung et al., 2021). Flow enables artists to lose awareness of external distractions and fully immerse themselves in the creative process, promoting greater cognitive flexibility and originality (Goodwin, 2020). Although existing research acknowledges the importance of these psychological states in facilitating artistic creativity, there remains a gap in understanding how individual traits and environmental factors jointly activate emotional Engagement and artistic Flow in culturally specific artistic practices like Chinese figurative expressionism.

Addressing this gap, the present study aims to investigate the psychological and cultural determinants of artistic innovation among Chinese figurative expressionist painters. Specifically, it examines how intrinsic Motivation, creative Climate, cultural Identity, and openness to Experience influence artistic innovation both directly and indirectly through emotional Engagement and artistic Flow. Drawing on a cross-sectional design, data were collected from 312 Chinese artists using validated Likert-scale instruments and analyzed through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling. By integrating these factors within a unified framework, this research offers a comprehensive perspective on the interplay of personal drives, cultural influences, and psychological states in shaping artistic creativity. It contributes to ongoing discussions in creativity and cultural psychology literature, which increasingly call for context-sensitive models that move beyond Western-centric assumptions and consider the distinctive cultural histories and aesthetic traditions of non-Western societies. Additionally, this study has practical relevance for artists, art educators, cultural policymakers, and creative industries by identifying the psychological conditions and cultural dynamics that foster artistic innovation. The next section of the study provides a review of the literature, the framework of the study, and the hypotheses. Furthermore, the material and methods section explains the instruments and data collection. The results section interprets the findings of the study, while the discussion highlights the findings in the context of previous studies. The conclusion section highlights the theoretical and practical contributions of the research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Intrinsic Motivation is a key factor in creative performance in artistic contexts (Abdullah & Abdillah, 2021). It is described as an activity that the artist pursues for its own sake rather than for externally driven rewards, and it has long been assumed to denote an artist's enhanced creative potential. Specifically in the visual arts, especially in painting, intrinsically motivated artists become more embedded in the creative process and produce works that are original and meaningful to them as artists (Ashley et al., 2023). Prior research has indicated that intrinsic Motivation (Sindhuja & Dunstan Rajkumar, 2025) is related to emotional Engagement, particularly for artists who produce work for internal satisfaction, as it is likely that emotional connections will flourish (Huang et al., 2021). Emotional Engagement will influence not only the entirety of the artist's (creative) Experience, but also the expressive or interpretive quality of the outcome.

Creative Climate has been generally regarded as a component facilitating artistic creativity and innovation (Yokochi & Okada, 2021). Creative Climate, as a level of environmental and social conditions supporting, encouraging, and fostering creative behavior, explains that within the visual arts, a creative climate and supportive environment will not only promote the freedom of expression or experimenting with ideas but also can foster emotional involvement of artists (Zhang et al., 2021). These earlier studies have suggested that when artists arrive at their jobs (i.e., studio, community workshop) and perceive the work environment as supportive and open to new ideas, it enhances the emotional involvement the artist can experience while engaged in the creative activity (Fernández, 2025).

Emotional involvement enhances the expressive qualities or depth of artworks, while also enhancing the relationship between the artist and the product of their efforts (Gong, 2021). The creative Climate has also been associated with the phenomenon of Flow, as is typically attributed to the literature on creativity. As scholars describe, environmental variables such as encouragement, autonomy, and access to creative resources significantly contribute to achieving Flow (Brinkmann et al., 2023). In an environmental context, support or encouragement fostered a climate that, when appropriately used, encouraged painters to occupy a stage of 'absorbed', favoring their entire capacity to engage in a visual artwork, while removing distractions (Dolese & Kacinik, 2021). Any experience of Flow that enhances the state or condition leads to increased exploration or experimentation in their creative process, which subsequently fosters exploration, creativity, and innovation.

Cultural Identity has surfaced as an important consideration when examining creative expression, particularly in

the case of visual arts traditions that share a fitting lineage, such as figurative expressionism (Zhang-Yu et al., 2021). Cultural Identity, which we will define as a sense of belonging and endorsing values, symbols, and history of a particular culture, has a potent influence on both the emotional and cognitive aspects of artistic creation (Yuan et al., 2021). Prior research has confirmed that artists who have a strong cultural identity are more effectively attached to their creative practice because the act of painting is a form of cultural pride, concerning cultural memories, personal history, and Identity (Hacmun et al., 2021). This affects the degree of expressivity or the authenticity of the expressivity of their artworks and impacts the affective bond to the creative practice itself.

Openness to Experience is almost always identified as one of the most important personality factors linked to artistic creativity and innovation (Huang et al., 2021). Openness is summarized as an individual's inclination towards seeking new experiences, new ideas, and an appreciation of new aesthetic forms. The role of openness as an impact of emotional Engagement or creative Engagement in artistic practice has emerged as an important conceptual factor linking artistic media (Jiawei & Mokmin, 2023). Accordingly, in the visual arts, more open individuals tend to process emotional experiences more sensitively and consequently more deeply when engaged with their artwork (Chiu et al., 2024). An individual's sensitivity to emotional Engagement enriches their artistic Engagement as well as personal ownership of an artwork that is expressive in a meaningful way.

Openness to Experience is also strongly linked to flow states while performing an artistic task (Liu, 2022). Scholars indicated that individuals who are open to Experience are more likely to reach deep absorption in their task, as their curiosity and openness to uncertainty will prompt them to be more immersed in complex and challenging creative processes (Millet et al., 2023). About painting, artists who are high in openness will usually engage and experiment with more unconventional painting techniques that involve a complex range of visual elements and, therefore, are more likely to be triggered towards a flow experience. The flow experience is important for ongoing creative performance and the creation of original artwork.

Emotional Engagement has traditionally been perceived as an integral part of the creative process, especially in the arts, where the act of expressing emotion is part of the core practice (Chiu et al., 2024). Emotional Engagement means the degree to which someone is emotionally invested and the feelings they have while engaging in their creative process. Visual artists who emotionally engage with their work generally also form a more personal connection to their artwork and can reflect depth of feeling and genuineness in their creations (Oksanen et al., 2023). Research has previously indicated that emotional immersion in work may also result in an expanded sense of artistic innovation, with painters revealing their emotional state in new ways of expression, represented in innovative visual narratives (Liu, 2022). Emotional Engagement not only serves to add expressive worth to artworks but may also facilitate emotional triggers as a source of artistic risk-taking or inventiveness.

Intrinsic Motivation, the desire to engage in creative activities for their own sake and personal interest, has long been established as a key antecedent of creativity (deMatos et al., 2021). However, a large body of research now suggests that its influence on creative performance, in particular, is often mediated by several affective factors (Betzler & Camina, 2020). When people are intrinsically motivated, their emotional Engagement becomes heightened, which includes being absorbed in the creative task, feeling passionate about the work they do, and experiencing enjoyment (Brinkmann et al., 2023). Enhanced emotional Engagement enhances cognitive flexibility and perseverance and improves artistic innovation outcomes.

Also, a supportive creative climate improves emotional Engagement through an affective experience that creators find rewarding or positive (Cai et al., 2024). In a psychologically safe and stimulating climate, people experience positive affect, which makes them more invested in all aspects of their role. They feel valued and energized, which increases Engagement on the emotional level when creating (Garcia-Lazo et al., 2024). This emotional Engagement invites more Engagement in developing and exploring new ideas that can eventually lead to higher levels of artistic innovation.

The creative Climate in a working environment is another important factor affecting Flow and is permissive of unavoidable psychological impacts. Environments that foster autonomy, risk-taking, and sharing of ideas lead to thematic experiences about the working conditions that allow one to move to flow (Park et al., 2023). Artists' report feeling safer emotionally and cognitively when they view their creative environment as supportive and non-controlling, thus allowing for deeper Engagement and optimal functioning as they immerse themselves in their artistic practice (An & Nie, 2023). Flow enhances the likelihood of engaging in innovative artistic outputs. The following are the hypotheses proposed by this research.

H1(a): There is a relationship between intrinsic Motivation and emotional Engagement.
H1(b): There is a relationship between intrinsic Motivation and artistic Flow.
H1(c): There is a relationship between intrinsic Motivation and artistic innovation.
H2(a): There is a relationship between creative Climate and emotional Engagement.
H2(b): There is a relationship between creative Climate and artistic Flow.
H2(c): There is a relationship between creative Climate and artistic innovation.
H3(a): There is a relationship between cultural Identity and emotional Engagement.
H3(b): There is a relationship between cultural Identity and artistic Flow.
H3(c): There is a relationship between cultural Identity and artistic innovation.
H4(a): There is a relationship between openness to Experience and emotional Engagement.
H4(b): There is a relationship between openness to Experience and artistic Flow.
H4(c): There is a relationship between openness to Experience and artistic innovation.
H5: There is a relationship between emotional Engagement and artistic innovation.
H6: There is a relationship between artistic Flow and artistic innovation.
H7(a): There is a mediating role of emotional Engagement in the relationship between intrinsic Motivation and

artistic innovation.

H7(b): There is a mediating role of emotional Engagement in the relationship between creative Climate and artistic innovation.

H7(c): There is a mediating role of emotional Engagement in the relationship between cultural Identity and artistic innovation.

H7(d): There is a mediating role of emotional Engagement in the relationship between openness to Experience and artistic innovation.

H8(a): There is a mediating role of artistic Flow in the relationship between intrinsic Motivation and creative innovation.

H8(b): There is a mediating role of artistic Flow in the relationship between creative Climate and artistic innovation.

H8(c): There is a mediating role of artistic Flow in the relationship between cultural Identity and artistic innovation.

H8(d): There is a mediating role of artistic Flow in the relationship between openness to Experience and artistic innovation.

In this study, there are four independent variables and two mediating variables. However, the study has one dependent variable. The model of this research, highlighting the relationship between studies, is reported in Figure 1.

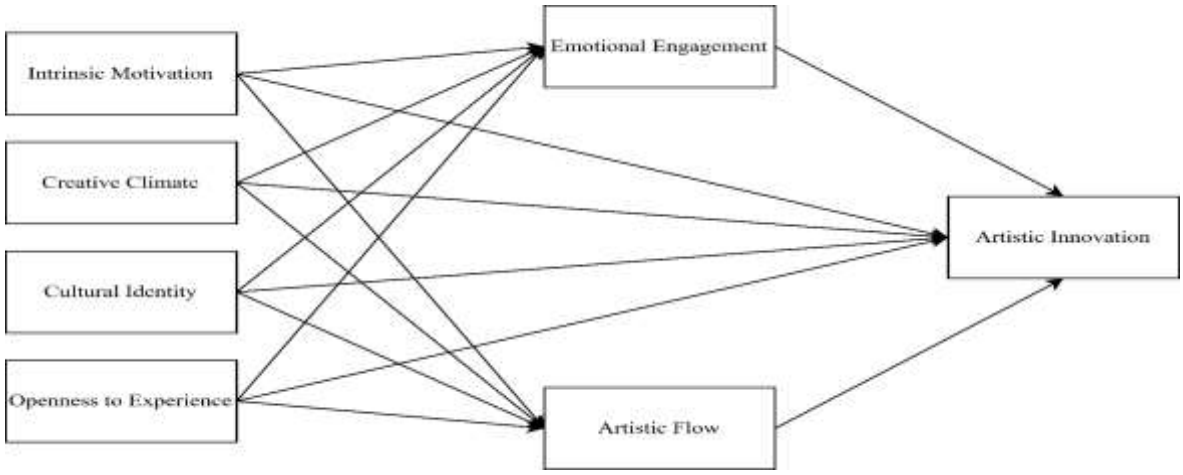

Figure 1. Research Model

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional research method to examine the relationship between psychological and cultural influences on artistic innovation in Chinese figurative expressionist painters. A cross-sectional study was considered appropriate for this research inquiry, since it enabled the researcher to gather data from a wide variety and number of respondents, with all the data being collected from a single point in time. A quantitative research method was chosen as it offered an objective way to measure constructs using standard Likert scale instruments, and it allowed for statistical analysis of the proposed relationships. The instruments of the study are reported in Appendix A. The population for this research consisted of figurative expressionist painters from China.

Data were collected in this study using a structured questionnaire with two main parts. The first section gathered basic demographic information such as gender, age, educational background, number of years of artistic Experience, occupation, Engagement with figurative expressionism, number of exhibitions participated in, and level of familiarity with international art trends. The second section included validated Likert scale instruments for measuring six constructs: intrinsic Motivation, creative Climate, cultural Identity, openness to Experience, emotional Engagement, artistic Flow, and artistic innovation.

Purposive sampling was used to identify respondents who met the inclusion criteria and were currently engaged in figurative expressionism. Furthermore, the sampling method was non-probability and appropriate for the study due to the scope of the selected artistic community. Overall, based on the previous literature and a minimum sample size of 200, and recommendations for Partial Least Squares - Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) of 312 cases were sought to ensure enough statistical power and stability. Data collection was completed through a combination of online and in-person distribution of the questionnaire.

RESULTS

The demographic characteristics of the participants in this study captured a detailed picture of the sample population, consisting of 312 participants (see Table 1). There were more women in the sample than men, with 63% (n = 195) female and 38% (n = 117) male. This presence indicates that women are a predominant representation in the target population in the arts area being investigated. The highest proportion of participants reported being young adults, 38% were in the 26-35 years old age group, and 34% were in the 36-45 years old age group. In contrast, the 18-25 years old accounted for the next most significant sample proportion at 23% of all cases, followed by the 46 years old and over group, which only accounted for 6% of the sample. Further information about the participants is reported in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographics

Demographic Question	Response Option	Count	Total	Proportion
Gender	Male	117	312	38%
	Female	195	312	63%
Age (Years)	18–25	71	312	23%
	26–35	117	312	38%
	36–45	106	312	34%
	46 and above	18	312	6%
Highest Educational Qualification	High School	18	312	6%
	Diploma	90	312	29%
	Bachelor's Degree	109	312	35%
	Master's Degree	92	312	30%
	Doctorate (PhD)	3	312	1%
Years of Artistic Experience	Less than 2 years	94	312	30%
	2–5 years	104	312	33%
	6–10 years	100	312	32%
	More than 10 years	14	312	5%
Primary Occupation	Full-time Artist	99	312	32%
	Fine Arts Student	78	312	25%
	Art Educator	101	312	32%
	Other	34	312	11%
Engagement in Figurative Expressionism	Professional Artist	101	312	32%
	Semi-Professional Artist	137	312	44%
	Art Student	74	312	24%
Number of Exhibitions/Competitions Participated In	1–2	121	312	39%
	3–5	100	312	32%
	More than 5	91	312	29%
Familiarity with International Art Trends	Slightly familiar	101	312	32%
	Moderately familiar	109	312	35%
	Very familiar	102	312	33%

Factor loadings are used to assess the strength of the association between each item and its latent construct; commonly, values greater than 0.7 indicate a strong association (Hair et al., 2011). Cronbach's alpha indicates internal consistency reliability, where the accepted level of reliability is approximately 0.7 or greater (Hair et al., 2011). Composite reliability (CR) serves a similar role as does Cronbach's alpha; however, CR typically provides an arguably more accurate estimate, especially in structural equation modeling. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) indicates how much of the Variance of the construct represents the amount of measurement error. Commonly, an AVE of above 0.5 indicates adequate convergent validity (Hair et al., 2011).

Based on the findings, all constructs show robust convergent validity (see Table 2 and Figure 2). All items had factor loadings above the 0.7 threshold, indicating that the items reliably measure their intended meaning. The Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability for all constructs are well above the recommended threshold of 0.9, indicating high internal consistency across the items. Specifically, creative Climate (CR = 0.965; AVE = 0.845) and cultural identity (CR = 0.967; AVE = 0.807) had powerful psychometric properties. Furthermore, the AVE across all constructs ranges from 0.719 to 0.845, suggesting that the items converge well on their intended constructs.

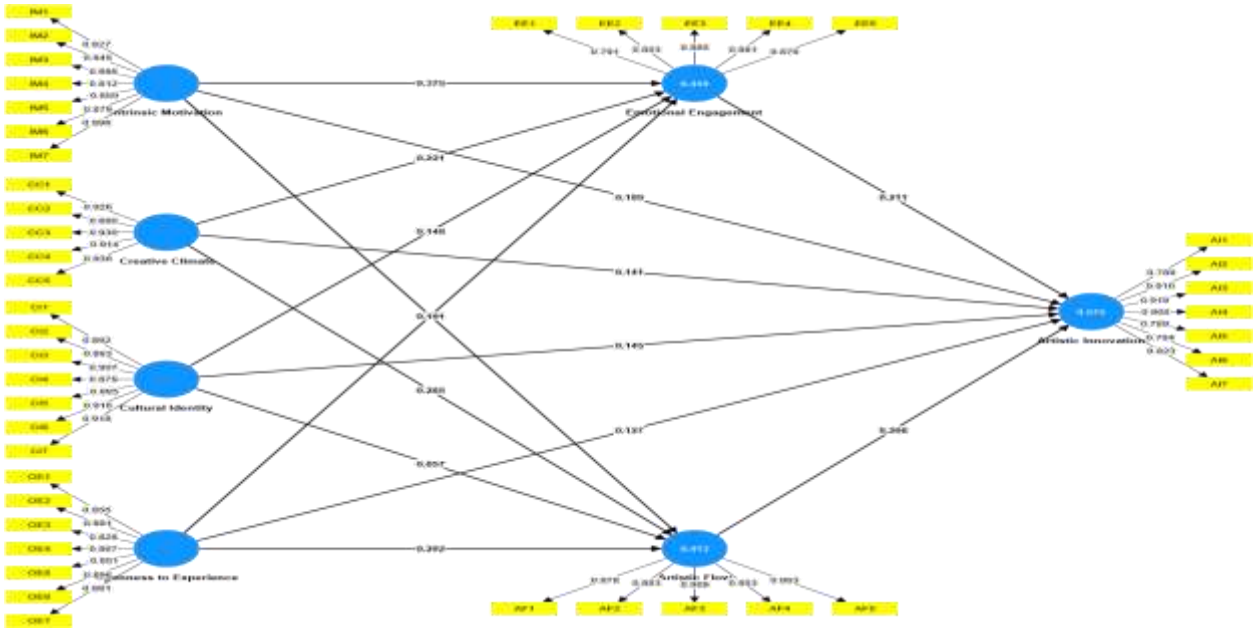

Figure 2. Measurement Model

Table 2. Convergent Validity

Variables	Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Average Variance extracted
Artistic Flow	AF1	0.878	0.925	0.943	0.769
	AF2	0.883			
	AF3	0.909			
	AF4	0.853			
	AF5	0.863			
Artistic Innovation	AI1	0.789	0.934	0.947	0.719
	AI2	0.910			
	AI3	0.919			
	AI4	0.900			
	AI5	0.789			
	AI6	0.794			
	AI7	0.823			
Creative Climate	CC1	0.926	0.954	0.965	0.845
	CC2	0.890			
	CC3	0.930			
	CC4	0.914			
	CC5	0.936			
Cultural Identity	CI1	0.892	0.960	0.967	0.807
	CI2	0.893			
	CI3	0.907			
	CI4	0.879			
	CI5	0.885			
	CI6	0.916			
	CI7	0.918			
Emotional Engagement	EE1	0.791	0.902	0.928	0.720
	EE2	0.803			
	EE3	0.885			
	EE4	0.881			
	EE5	0.876			
Intrinsic Motivation	IM1	0.827	0.939	0.951	0.734
	IM2	0.845			
	IM3	0.886			
	IM4	0.812			
	IM5	0.850			
	IM6	0.879			
	IM7	0.896			
Openness to Experience	OE1	0.855	0.945	0.955	0.752
	OE2	0.891			
	OE3	0.828			
	OE4	0.867			
	OE5	0.851			
	OE6	0.896			
	OE7	0.881			

In addition, the assessment of discriminant validity was conducted. The Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratios of correlations are presented in Table 3. The HTMT is a measure of discriminant validity between latent constructs. HTMT values below 0.85 or 0.90 when more lenient demonstrate that the constructs are empirically distinct (Henseler et al., 2015). The HTMT values provided in Table 3 range from HTMT = 0.218 on cultural Identity and openness to experience to HTMT = 0.672 on artistic innovation and emotional Engagement, and all were below the conservative HTMT = 0.85.

Table 3. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio

Variables	Artistic Flow	Artistic Innovation	Creative Climate	Cultural Identity	Emotional Engagement	Intrinsic Motivation	Openness to Experience
Artistic Flow							
Artistic Innovation	0.638						
Creative Climate	0.594	0.639					
Cultural Identity	0.312	0.449	0.444				
Emotional Engagement	0.602	0.672	0.613	0.409			
Intrinsic Motivation	0.506	0.613	0.621	0.304	0.645		
Openness to Experience	0.533	0.497	0.493	0.218	0.425	0.354	

Additionally, Table 4 presents the values for the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) for variables included in predicting artistic Flow, artistic innovation, and emotional Engagement, and examines multicollinearity between predictors. VIF values are all far below the often acceptable level of 5 (Hair et al., 2011), indicating multicollinearity is not a serious issue in this study. The highest VIF value of 2.123 under the creative climate variable predicting artistic innovation indicates an acceptable amount of shared Variance amongst the predictors.

Table 4. Variance Inflation Factor

Variables	Artistic Flow	Artistic Innovation	Emotional Engagement
Artistic Flow		1.810	
Creative Climate	1.938	2.123	1.938
Cultural Identity	1.228	1.27	1.228
Emotional Engagement		1.965	
Intrinsic Motivation	1.546	1.823	1.546
Openness to Experience	1.291	1.445	1.291

Furthermore, the structural model assessment was performed to analyze the relationship between variables (see Figure 3 and Table 5). The first set of hypotheses (H1) examines the influence of Intrinsic Motivation. H1(a), which predicts Intrinsic Motivation positively affects Emotional Engagement, is strongly supported ($\beta = 0.375$, $p < 0.001$), indicating a robust relationship. H1(b) and H1(c), predicting effects on Artistic Flow ($\beta = 0.191$, $p = 0.007$) and Artistic Innovation ($\beta = 0.189$, $p = 0.002$) respectively, are also significant, though with smaller coefficients, suggesting that while intrinsic Motivation contributes to artistic outcomes, its most substantial impact is on emotional Engagement.

The second hypothesis cluster (H2) investigates the role of Creative Climate. H2(a) and H2(b), which test its effects on Emotional Engagement and Artistic Flow, are both statistically significant ($\beta = 0.221$, $p = 0.005$; $\beta = 0.285$, $p < 0.001$), implying that a supportive creative environment fosters both emotional and experiential dimensions of artistic activity. However, H2(c), the effect on Artistic Innovation, yields a marginal result ($\beta = 0.141$, $p = 0.054$), which suggests a weak or borderline-significant influence.

Hypothesis H3 assesses the impact of Cultural Identity. H3(a) and H3(c), which test its influence on Emotional Engagement ($\beta = 0.149$, $p = 0.037$) and Artistic Innovation ($\beta = 0.145$, $p = 0.003$), are statistically significant, indicating that a strong sense of cultural Identity contributes meaningfully to both emotional and creative outcomes. However, H3(b), the effect on Artistic Flow ($\beta = 0.057$, $p = 0.324$), is not significant.

The final group of hypotheses (H4–H6) further underscores essential relationships. H4 confirms that Openness to Experience significantly predicts all three dependent variables: Emotional Engagement ($\beta = 0.135$, $p = 0.028$), Artistic Flow ($\beta = 0.292$, $p < 0.001$), and Artistic Innovation ($\beta = 0.127$, $p = 0.017$), indicating that this personality trait is a consistent driver of creative and affective responses. H5 and H6 reveal that both Emotional Engagement ($\beta = 0.211$, $p = 0.002$) and Artistic Flow ($\beta = 0.208$, $p = 0.001$) significantly enhance Artistic Innovation, highlighting their mediating or complementary roles in the innovation process.

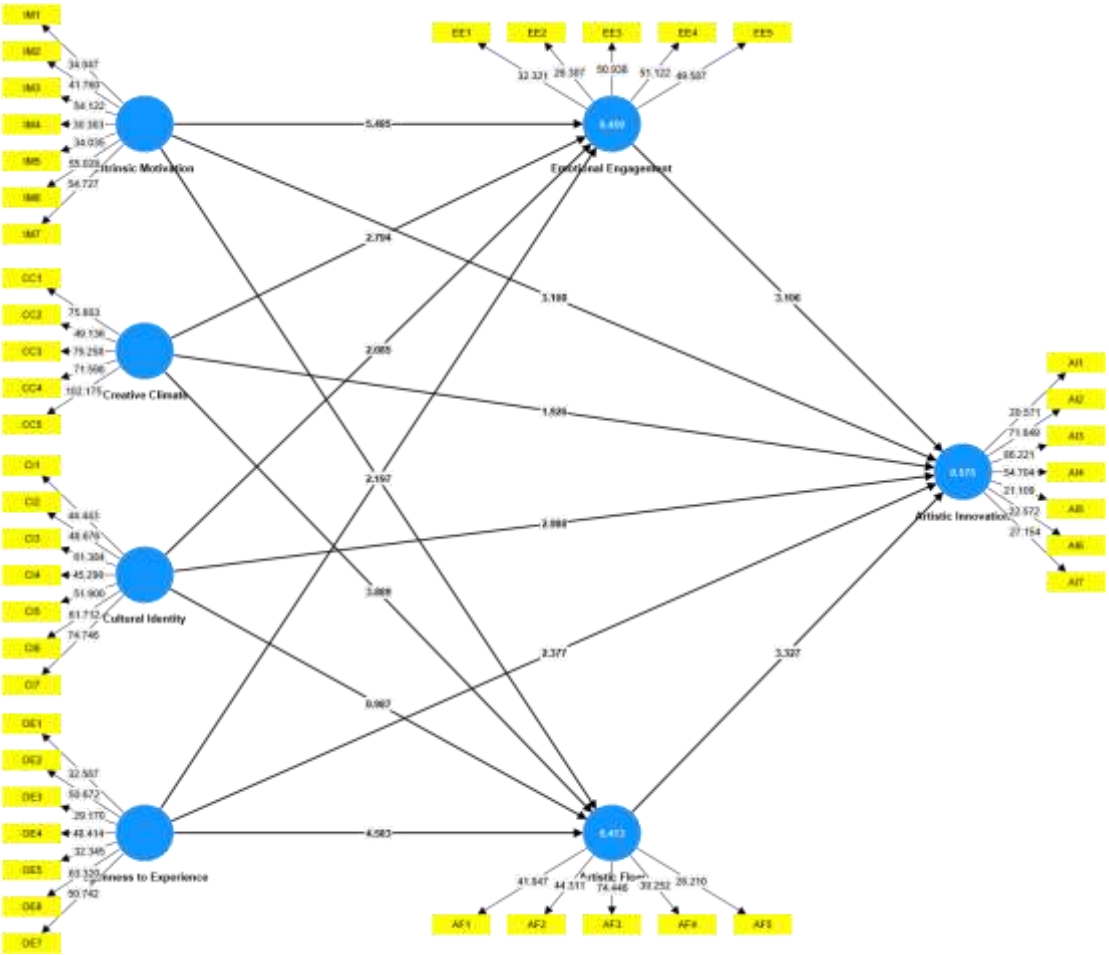

Figure 3. Structural Model

Table 5. Direct Hypotheses Findings

Hypotheses	Paths	Original sample	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values
H1 (a)	Intrinsic Motivation -> Emotional Engagement	0.375	0.068	5.485	0.000
H1 (b)	Intrinsic Motivation -> Artistic Flow	0.191	0.071	2.701	0.007
H1 (c)	Intrinsic Motivation -> Artistic Innovation	0.189	0.061	3.108	0.002
H2 (a)	Creative Climate -> Emotional Engagement	0.221	0.079	2.794	0.005
H2 (b)	Creative Climate -> Artistic Flow	0.285	0.073	3.889	0.000
H2 (c)	Creative Climate -> Artistic Innovation	0.141	0.073	1.926	0.054
H3 (a)	Cultural Identity -> Emotional Engagement	0.149	0.072	2.085	0.037
H3 (b)	Cultural Identity -> Artistic Flow	0.057	0.057	0.987	0.324
H3 (c)	Cultural Identity -> Artistic Innovation	0.145	0.049	2.988	0.003
H4 (a)	Openness to Experience -> Emotional Engagement	0.135	0.062	2.197	0.028
H4 (b)	Openness to Experience -> Artistic Flow	0.292	0.064	4.583	0.000
H4 (c)	Openness to Experience -> Artistic Innovation	0.127	0.053	2.377	0.017
H5	Emotional Engagement -> Artistic Innovation	0.211	0.068	3.106	0.002
H6	Artistic Flow -> Artistic Innovation	0.208	0.063	3.327	0.001

Furthermore, the mediation analysis was performed in this study, and the findings are presented in Table 6. The results for emotional engagement H7 (a), H7 (b), H7 (c) and H7 (d) show significant mediation effects for intrinsic Motivation ($\beta = 0.079$, $p = 0.014$), creative Climate ($\beta = 0.046$, $p = 0.046$), and cultural identity ($\beta = 0.031$, $p = 0.047$). These findings suggest that emotional Engagement serves as a psychological mechanism through which these variables positively influence artistic innovation. However, the mediation effect for openness to Experience ($\beta = 0.028$, $p = 0.091$) is not statistically significant, indicating that while openness may directly influence innovation, it does not do so through emotional Engagement.

In the artistic flow mediation model H8 (a), H8 (b), H8 (c) and H8 (d), both creative Climate ($\beta = 0.059$, $p = 0.010$) and openness to Experience ($\beta = 0.061$, $p = 0.013$) demonstrate significant indirect effects on artistic innovation, suggesting that a supportive environment and a disposition toward openness enhance innovation by promoting deeper Engagement in the creative process. The mediation effect of intrinsic Motivation ($\beta = 0.040$, $p = 0.054$) is marginally non-significant, implying a weak or partial mediating role. Cultural Identity, however, shows no significant mediation through artistic Flow ($\beta = 0.012$, $p = 0.374$), reinforcing the idea that its influence on innovation is more likely channeled through emotional Engagement rather than immersive creative states.

Table 6. Mediation Hypotheses Findings

Hypotheses	Paths	Original sample	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values
H7 (a)	Intrinsic Motivation -> Emotional Engagement -> Artistic Innovation	0.079	0.032	2.452	0.014
H7 (b)	Creative Climate -> Emotional Engagement -> Artistic Innovation	0.046	0.023	2.000	0.046
H7 (c)	Cultural Identity -> Emotional Engagement -> Artistic Innovation	0.031	0.016	1.986	0.047
H7 (d)	Openness to Experience -> Emotional Engagement -> Artistic Innovation	0.028	0.017	1.689	0.091
H8 (a)	Intrinsic Motivation -> Artistic Flow -> Artistic Innovation	0.040	0.021	1.927	0.054
H8 (b)	Creative Climate -> Artistic Flow -> Artistic Innovation	0.059	0.023	2.577	0.010
H8 (c)	Cultural Identity -> Artistic Flow -> Artistic Innovation	0.012	0.013	0.890	0.374
H8 (d)	Openness to Experience -> Artistic Flow -> Artistic Innovation	0.061	0.024	2.492	0.013

In addition, the effect size was examined in this study. In Table 7, the study presents the effect sizes (f^2) of the predictors on artistic Flow, artistic innovation, and emotional Engagement. According to Cohen et al. (2009), effects of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 were interpreted as small, medium, and large effects, respectively. The only predictor variable with any sizable effect appears to be intrinsic Motivation on emotional Engagement ($f^2 = 0.168$), which represents a medium effect. Openness to Experience was the next best predictor, exerting an effect on artistic Flow ($f^2 = 0.112$). Following this was the Creative Climate with a small effect ($f^2 = 0.072$) on both artistic flows. Cultural Identity and emotional Engagement on artistic innovation ($f^2 = 0.039$ and 0.053, respectively) reflect some degree of meaningfulness concerning effect size interpretation; however, they would be considered small.

Table 7. Effect Size

Variables	Artistic Flow	Artistic Innovation	Emotional Engagement
Artistic Flow		0.056	
Creative Climate	0.072	0.022	0.047
Cultural Identity	0.004	0.039	0.034
Emotional Engagement		0.053	
Intrinsic Motivation	0.04	0.046	0.168
Openness to Experience	0.112	0.026	0.026

Finally, the findings of predictive relevance were assessed. Figure 4 and Table 8 highlight the value of Q2. According to Hair et al. (2011), predictive relevance values above zero are considered significant. The findings reported in Table 8 highlight that 40% predictive relevance was found for artistic innovation.

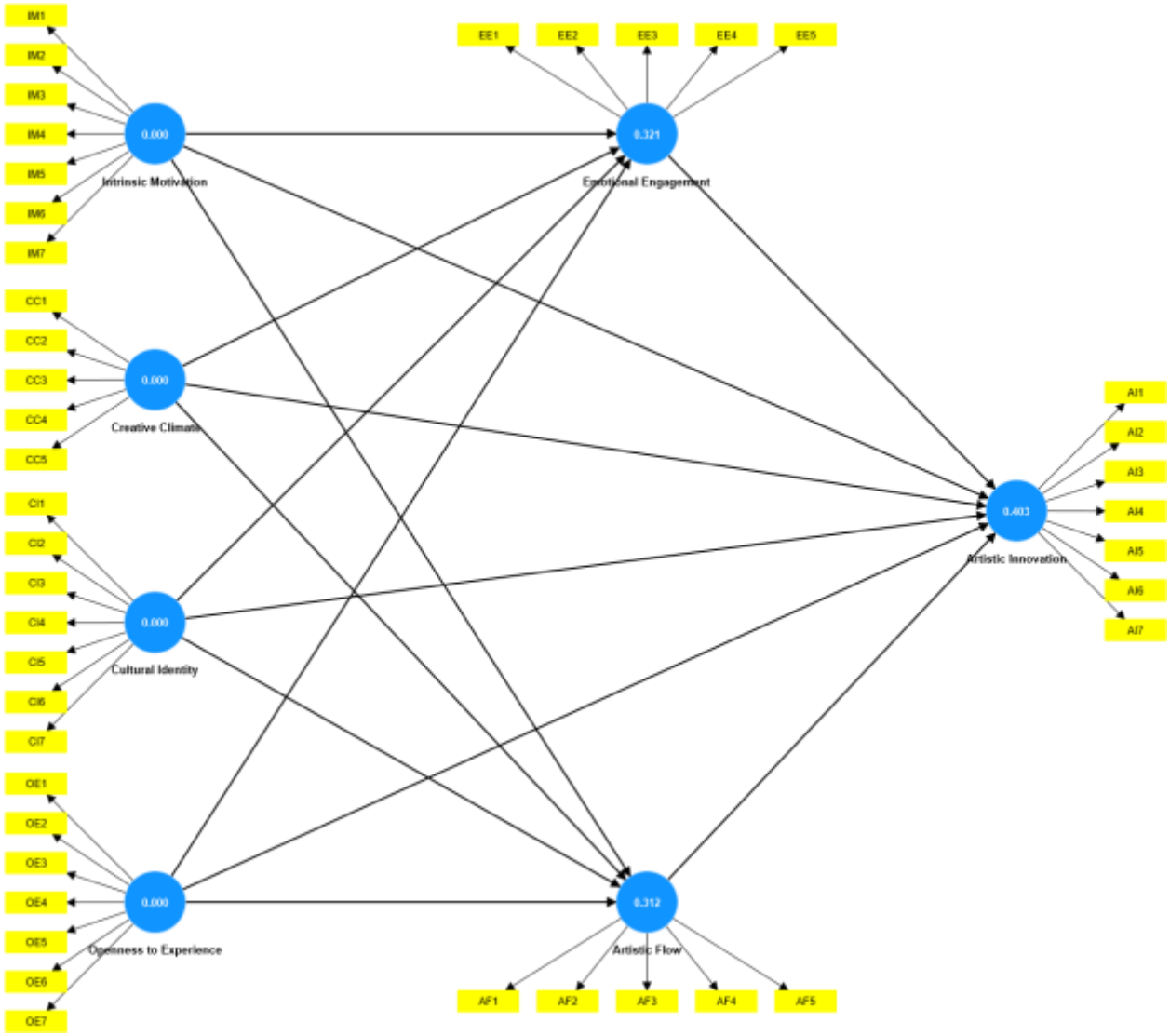

Figure 4. Predictive Relevance

Table 8. Predictive Relevance

Variables	SSO	SSE	Q^2 (=1-SSE/SSO)
Artistic Flow	1560.000	1072.846	0.312
Artistic Innovation	2184.000	1303.459	0.403
Creative Climate	1560.000	1560.000	0.000
Cultural Identity	2184.000	2184.000	0.000
Emotional Engagement	1560.000	1058.495	0.321
Intrinsic Motivation	2184.000	2184.000	0.000
Openness to Experience	2184.000	2184.000	0.000

DISCUSSIONS

The findings provide convincing evidence for the hypothesized effect of intrinsic Motivation. Intrinsic Motivation was a strong and significant predictor of emotional Engagement (H1a), artistic Flow (H1b), and artistic innovation (H1c). These findings are consistent with previous literature that draws attention to the deeper affective involvement and more extended periods of cognitive immersion in an artistic practice by artists who engage for intrinsic satisfaction (Adeyemi, 2024). Inarguably, intrinsic Motivation had the most decisive influence on emotional Engagement, suggesting that an internally motivated desire to create art is compelling on the emotional connection between artist and artwork (Adejumo, 2022).

The hypothesis that a favorable creative climate supports emotional Engagement (H2a) and artistic Flow (H2b) was corroborated, highlighting that the situational context of an innovative environment is responsible for shaping creative psychological states. A studio or art environment is, when perceived to be open and supportive, capable of offering both emotional safety and artistic autonomy needed for both emotional Engagement and experiential Engagement (Centillas et al., 2024). However, the weak significance of Creative Climate's direct effects on artistic innovation (H2c) implies its effect is likely to occur indirectly. While the open and supportive Climate does not directly propel innovation potential, it establishes a necessary condition for emotional and experiential Engagement, which, eventually and indirectly, may lead to the innovative outcome (Chang & Mahadevan, 2022).

Cultural Identity had a significant effect on emotional Engagement (H3a) and artistic innovation (H3c), but not on artistic Flow (H3b). This suggests a duality of possible meanings: cultural identification is an affective and symbolic resource in artistic creation, but it does not always serve as a means of immersing oneself in a sustained contemplation of meaning. Artists telling or unpacking their cultural narrative can draw emotional meaning from it and feel purposeful and expressive in the presence of the associated emotional meanings (Coletti, 2024). Still, their lack of influence on Flow suggests that cultural themes alone do not enable a state of Flow characterized by total concentration and absorption (Darda et al., 2023).

The personality characteristic of openness to Experience was identified as a reliable predictor of all three outcome variables. It significantly contributed to emotional Engagement (H4a), artistic flow (H4b), and artistic innovation (H4c), by long-held psychological theories connecting openness to creativity. The most substantial effect was on creative Flow, suggesting that open individuals are especially likely to reach immersive states due to a combination of curiosity, tolerance for ambiguity, and attunement to aesthetics (Bakka et al., 2024). Furthermore, the openness was also a direct predictor of innovation, indicating that openness functions both through psychological states and through a direct disposition to push against norms and to seek new techniques, characteristics that are exceptionally valued in figurative expressionist work (Brand et al., 2021).

Emotional Engagement (H5) and artistic Flow (H6) both explained significant Variance in artistic innovation, providing further evidence that both serve as proximal psychological states mediating the effect of the dispositional/environmental predictors as well as leading to a creative output variability. Emotional Engagement connects a practitioner more fully to their subject matter through the connection to physical medium and creates a sense of authenticity and engages expressive risk (Ashley et al., 2023). Flow, on the other hand, promotes sustained attention and cognitive flexibility, enabling technical experimentation while selectively allowing original ideas to emerge (Betzler et al., 2021).

Mediation analysis revealed that emotional Engagement significantly mediates the relationships between intrinsic Motivation (H7a), creative climate (H7b), and cultural Identity (H7c) with artistic innovation. These findings reaffirm the central role of affective involvement in artistic creativity. Emotional Engagement appears to serve as the psychological mechanism that translates internal drives, cultural resonance, and supportive contexts into innovative expression (Adamou et al., 2023). Interestingly, the mediation effect of emotional Engagement between openness to Experience and innovation (H7d) was not significant, suggesting that for open individuals, innovation arises more directly or via other pathways, such as Flow.

Artistic Flow significantly mediated the relationship between creative Climate (H8b) and openness to Experience (H8d) with artistic innovation. These results indicate that both environmental support and personality disposition can encourage Flow, which in turn facilitates innovation. The mediation from intrinsic Motivation to innovation via Flow (H8a) approached significance. Still, it did not reach conventional thresholds, while cultural Identity did not mediate through Flow (H8c), further emphasizing that cultural identification may elicit affective but not immersive states. These findings differentiate the types of inputs, personal, artistic, or contextual, that foster either affective or immersive psychological conditions for creativity (Abdullah & Abdillah, 2021).

CONCLUSIONS

The study aimed to shed light on the psychological and cultural antecedents of artistic innovation in the form of Chinese figurative expressionism. By combining key psychological factors of intrinsic Motivation and openness to experience with contextual and cultural aspects of creative Climate and cultural Identity, this research provides a coherent model for understanding how emotional Engagement and artistic Flow mediate the process of artistic intention to innovative output. The results indicate that intrinsic Motivation is a key factor driving both emotional and experiential Engagement in the artistic process. Artists who are motivated by their practice to achieve internal satisfaction developed greater emotional ties to their works and were more likely to attain intense flow experiences, both of which positively impacted creative, innovative art production. Similarly, openness to Experience was an essential predictor across emotional, experiential, and creative outcomes of the study, confirming the importance of individual attributes to support aesthetic risk-taking and stylistic experimentation.

The effect of environmental factors, especially the creative Climate, was further confirmed. A constructive, autonomous, and resourced creative landscape is conducive to both emotional Engagement and Flow, while it might not have a similar direct implication to innovation. Similarly, while cultural Identity did not emerge as a strong variable for Flow, it is relevant to understand how emotional Engagement was intensified and culturally inspired forms of innovation were motivated in part, stressing the value of culture-based narratives and symbolism to the direction of contemporary Chinese artists. The main finding is that both emotional Engagement and artistic Flow were affirmed as proximal mechanisms. In contrast, the more distal factors, such as personal psychological and environmental conditions, are channeled to creative innovation. These mediatory states demonstrate that doing creativity in visual arts is not only a result of a complex amalgam of dispositional tendencies or situational stimuli but also of emotional and absorbed experiences during and as a part of the creative process.

The study is a valuable addition to the growing body of literature in creativity and cultural psychology, as it presents an integrated model of creativity that includes both psychological characteristics and socio-cultural contexts. By providing empirical evidence for the mediating roles of emotional Engagement and artistic Flow, this study supports the understanding of creative outcomes not as the result of strictly dispositional considerations, but as the outcome of multiple psychological states that connect individuals' internal motivations to external contexts. Additionally, the study gives culturally specific perspectives beyond traditional Western-centric notions of creativity. Importantly, the different roles of cultural Identity and

creative Climate in the Chinese art context suggest a need for multiple theories that are nuanced to culture and forms of art.

For practicing artists and especially artists that engage in figurative expressionism, this study generates empirical support for the importance of intrinsic Motivation and openness to Experience, both psychologically defined characteristics. The study extends this effect, suggesting that they influence not only how the artist feels about the work they create, but also how they are engaged in the creative process and the originality of their resulting output. Further, artists who are emotionally engaged in their work or more regularly experience an artistic flow state may be more likely to produce new, meaningful work. This insight encourages artists to prioritize emotionally resonant and immersive creative practices, rather than focusing solely on technical skill or external validation.

In this regard, arts organizations and cultural institutions can also use this research at the policy level by understanding the psyche and environment in which artists work. The development of funding bodies and cultural policy can benefit by not only funding the creation and exhibition of artworks, but also by funding measures that support intrinsic Motivation and creative Flow, such as residencies for artists, funding for studio space, and funding for collaborative programming. Cultural Identity has been highlighted as a great motivator of emotional connection and innovation. It should be supported through initiatives that develop heritage-based or Indigenous artistic inquiry, especially when developing emerging artists who can navigate the ongoing tension between traditional and modern practices in the creative process.

While this investigation proffered crucial insights into the psychological and cultural foundations of artistic innovation in Chinese figurative expressionism, limitations do exist. All limitations provided proper avenues for future research that could deepen and widen the current understanding of creative processes in visual art. First, cross-sectional research designs have limits in establishing causal relationships among variables. Although structural equation modeling permits the testing of more intricate associations, it does not represent the dynamic, developing processes of an artist's Engagement and innovation. Therefore, longitudinal approaches in future research may be needed to capture how psychological states and creative outcomes change over time, but more importantly, how constructs like intrinsic Motivation or emotional Engagement evolve and influence stakeholder innovation across stages in an artist's career.

Second, the research relied exclusively on self-report data that, while using validated instruments, is prone to social desirability and personal interpretation biases. Constructs like emotional Engagement and artistic Flow, in particular, are intensely personal constructs in the person's expression, whereby their survey responses may not capture or idealize what they experience. Future research may build upon this research by turning to a mixed methods approach, like using in-depth interviews, behavioral observation, or analyzing the actual artwork, providing more objective or narrative-based insights rather than relying solely on self-report data.

Third, the sample was constricted to Chinese figurative expressionist painters, providing culturally rich, genre-specific data, but limited in its applicability to other cultural situations or contexts. Further research could apply the model to different artistic genres, such as abstract, installation, and digital art, or consider cross-cultural contrasts, to see if similar psychological and cultural mechanisms exist and operate in other socio-artistic traditions, such as Western modernism and South Asian folk art.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Measurement Questionnaire

Variables	Instruments
Intrinsic Motivation	I create art because it gives me personal satisfaction.
	I enjoy the process of painting regardless of the outcome.
	I feel a strong inner desire to express myself through painting.
	My Motivation for creating art comes from within.
	I paint because it is meaningful to me personally.
	I find painting to be a rewarding activity on its own.
	I create artworks to satisfy my creative urges.
Creative Climate	My working environment encourages creative ideas.
	I feel supported by others when trying new artistic techniques.
	My surroundings inspire artistic creativity.
	The people around me value artistic innovation.
	I have access to resources that foster artistic creativity.
Cultural Identity	My cultural background influences my painting style.
	I feel proud to express my culture through my artwork.
	Traditional Chinese elements are important in my art.
	I see my art as a reflection of my cultural Identity.
	I consciously incorporate cultural symbols into my paintings.
	Chinese heritage shapes my creative ideas.
	My cultural values affect how I approach artistic expression.
Openness to Experience	I enjoy trying out new painting styles and techniques.
	I am curious about new artistic ideas.
	I often explore unconventional artistic concepts.
	I seek opportunities to experiment with different materials.
	I am open to diverse cultural influences in my artwork.
	I value artistic works that challenge traditional boundaries.
	I find inspiration in unexpected sources.

Emotional Engagement	I feel deeply connected to my emotions while painting.
	My artworks reflect my emotional states.
	I lose track of time when emotionally involved in painting.
	Painting helps me process my emotions.
	I feel emotionally fulfilled after completing a painting.
Artistic Flow	I feel completely immersed while creating art.
	Time passes quickly when I am painting.
	I am entirely focused when working on a painting.
	I feel energized and motivated during the painting process.
	My creativity feels natural and effortless while painting.
Artistic Innovation	My paintings are original compared to others.
	I often introduce new ideas in my artwork.
	I create artworks that reflect unique perspectives.
	I strive to produce innovative artistic expressions.
	My artworks differ from conventional figurative styles.
	I experiment with new forms in my art.
	I often blend traditional and modern elements creatively.

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