

Exploration and Analysis of "Integration of Chinese and Western Cultures" of Chinese Realistic Ink Wash Figure Painting

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Abstract

Chinese figure painting is the earliest type of painting to be mature in the history of Chinese painting. After its peak in the Jin and Tang dynasties, Chinese figure painting turned into a low tide in the Ming and Qing dynasties. Under the influence of the May Fourth New Culture Movement's concept of "introducing the Western culture into China", realistic ink wash figure painting emerged, which was different from traditional painting. Realistic ink wash figure painting is a new kind of painting that combines traditional Chinese painting methods with concepts of Western scientific painting. With the mutual reconciliation of realistic modeling and traditional Chinese painting, it makes up for the shortcomings of traditional Chinese figure painting in reproducing life, thus forming the diversified development of Chinese figure painting. Through an in-depth interpretation of the fusion of Chinese realistic ink figure painting with Chinese and Western, this paper accurately grasps the characteristics of the painting language, which is an important guide to the creation of Chinese realistic ink painting today.

Keywords: Realistic Ink Wash Figure Painting, Expressiveness, Reproduction, Integration

Traditional Chinese figure painting is based on the expression of emotions and feelings while Western painting is based on realism. The innovation of this paper is to compare the Western "scientific" realistic painting with the Chinese "romantic" traditional painting, and to analyze the difference between the expressiveness and reproducibility of Chinese and Western painting in depth, which provides great value for the integration of Chinese and Western painting in the future.

1. "SCIENCE" AND "ROMANCE" IN CHINESE AND WESTERN PAINTING

1.1 Western "scientific" realistic painting

During the Renaissance, humanism became the new spirit of the times, as human rights were advocated instead of theocracy. Mathematics and physical optics were gradually incorporated into art painting. Anatomy, perspective and chiaroscuro became scientific painting concepts at the time. At the height of the Renaissance, artists pursued a kind of "absolute beauty", the perfect lines and proportions. The pursuit of accurate and harmonious realistic style influenced the development of the painting world afterwards. For example, Leonardo da Vinci's "Mona Lisa" portrays a quiet and elegant female figure with a harmonious and mysterious demeanor.

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The effect of her smile seen from different angles is different, either sad or gentle. This visual effect comes from Leonardo da Vinci's mastery of color and physical optics.

The Renaissance artist Alberti proposed scientific theories such as single-point linear perspective and art imitating nature, among which art imitating nature is emphasized in books such as *On Painting*, where the ultimate goal of artistic creation is to reproduce nature and the most basic requirement is to learn from nature. "Imitation of nature is also progressive, from mere observation and imitation of nature to the sublimation of the beauty imitated from nature into the beauty of art".

"Imitation theory" is a traditional Western art theory that literature and art should be a mirror of life, and literary works should reproduce life to imitate reality and strive to express the reality of objective life. The ancient Greek philosopher Democritus believed that art was an imitation of nature. Plato believed that the object of art is not nature, but the world of ideas that makes nature visible, which shown in his "Three Beds Theory" in *The Ideal State*. The first bed is the bed created by God - the bed of ideas. The second bed is the bed created by craftsmen imitating ideas - the bed of material. The third is the bed created by the painter imitating the artisan - the bed of images. Leonardo da Vinci believed that "the painter's mind should be a mirror, always taking in the colors that reflect its mistakes and taking in as many images as there are things in front of it". The "mirror theory" emphasizes that art is the reflection and reproduction of nature. From the development of Western art history, the traditional Western painting style takes reproduction as the main expression method. The so-called reproduction refers to the artist's specific depiction of the objective object in his work. In the creation techniques, artists emphasize realism and verisimilitude, and reproduce reality with objective, rational and scientific way of thinking.

From the 17th to the first half of the 18th century, French classical painting represented by Poussin took the ancient Greek and Roman times as a model, favoring rationality and paying attention to the perfection of form and the beauty of ancient charm with clear and strict lines. Most of Poussin's work are based on mythology and religious stories, striving for rigor and balance. The figures are stately and sculptural, with sublime and quiet artistic characteristics, which reflected in the works *The Robbery of Sabine Women* and *The Shepherd of Arcadia*. *The Robbery of Sabine Women* depicts the scene of robbing the women of Sabine when the Roman city was established in ancient Rome. The figures in the painting have the sculptural sense of ancient Greece and Rome, and it reproduces the gripping scenes of robbery at that time with tension [1].

Taking the Renaissance as the guiding ideology, the neo-classicism in France from the end of the 18th century to the 19th century selected severe and significant historical or realistic subjects, emphasizing rationality and compositional integrity. The stylistic emphasis on sketching, which was combined realism and aesthetics, was a new artistic concept different from classicalism. Dawit and Angel were the main representatives. Dawit's *Oath of the Horace Brothers* was about the final battle decided by the elders between the ancient Romans and the neighboring Vulturnians in Roman times, who were exhausted from years of fighting. In this battle, three brothers of the Horace family were chosen, and the father distributed the weapons to the three brothers and swore to them. The figures occupy most of the space in the picture to better render the emotion of the time and the resolute expression of the characters. The contrasting colors of the mother's grief behind the father and the solemnity of the figures in front of him enrich the tragic atmosphere of the scene and strengthen the theme.

Most of the traditional Western paintings are based on the reproduction form, and the scientific painting concept of perspective, anatomy and chiaroscuro has achieved its rational and rigorous modeling concept that influences the future generations. Traditional Chinese painting, on the other hand, is different, focusing more on the inner world to express the subjective feeling of mood.

1.2 "Romance" of traditional Chinese painting

If we compare Western painting to a glass of strong wine with being quiet and impactful, then traditional Chinese painting is a cup of tea with being subtle, touching and romantic. The differences between Chinese and Western cultures lead to different aesthetic needs. Traditional Chinese painting emphasizes a subjective, sensual and romantic way of thinking, so traditional Chinese painting with more emphasis on imagery is more expressive. The traditional Chinese painting aesthetics has always pursued the "unity of heaven and man", advocating the integration of self-expression into the work. The painter is not painting heaven and earth but creating everything on the paper, and expressing his inner feelings after the subjective expression of choice. In the history of Chinese art, there is also an idea close to "imitation theory", which is called "learning from nature". The Tang Dynasty painter Zhang Zao proposed that "to learn from nature outside and to paint based on heart source". The term "nature" refers to nature, and "heart source" refers to the artist's inner perception, meaning that art creation should take nature as the teacher, but natural beauty cannot automatically become artistic beauty, which needs to be expressed through the artist's inner thoughts and perception. Art comes from life, but it is not reproduced and imitated but created through the artist's aesthetic consciousness. For example, Zheng Banqiao said: "In the clear autumn of the river pavilion, I got up in the morning to look at the bamboo, the smoke and sunlight and dew, all floating in the sparse branches and dense leaves [2]. I have an intention of painting. In fact, the bamboo in the chest is not the bamboo in the eyes. Therefore, the ink is sharpened and the paper is spread, and the brush is suddenly transformed, and the bamboo in the hand is not the bamboo in the chest". Zheng Banqiao's "bamboo in the eyes" is the bamboo seen by the eyes in reality, "bamboo in the chest" is the bamboo that has been added to the painter's inner emotions through his subjective aesthetic consciousness, and "bamboo in hand" is the bamboo that the artist finally shows with ink and brush. The difference with Plato's "Three Beds Theory" is that it expresses that reproduction is imitation, while Zheng Banqiao's three stages of bamboo painting pay more attention to the expression of the subject's lyricism. Although both have materialism, the essence is not the same [3].

Gu Kaizhi's *The Picture of The Ode of the River Goddess* is a long scroll with multiple storylines in color and silk, depicting the sincere and pure love story of Cao Zhi and the River Goddess. The figures and the mountains and rivers are well spaced out, and the natural overlap and alternation in different time and space reveal a beauty of space. The picture is divided into three sections. The first section depicts Cao Zhi's encounter with the River Goddess, a beautiful woman with flowing clothes above the water, on the shore of Luo River. The second section depicts the scene of separation after falling in love due to the difference between the gods and humans. The third section depicts Cao Zhi's longing and sadness for the River Goddess after her departure. This painting is composed by Gu Kaizhi based on Cao Zhi's *The Ode of the River Goddess*, and the plot is touching and poetic with romanticism.

1.3 The integration of "science" and "romance" in Chinese and Western painting

Chinese painting and Western painting are different in aesthetic thought and interest due to their regional differences. Western painting advocates the aesthetic interest of truth as beauty, mainly depicting objects, environments and other realities. The Renaissance artist Leonardo da Vinci believed that "painting is science" and emphasized the true and accurate depiction of objects. Chinese painting, on the other hand, focuses more on the expression of imagery and emotion, not intuitively depicting the object but expressing it through the subjective emotions of the painter. The so-called "imagination" emphasizes the important role of the creator's subjective thoughts and emotions in the creation of art. From the perspective of the tendency of painting tradition, Chinese painting emphasizes expressiveness while Western painting emphasizes reproduction, not

to say that Western painting is completely devoid of expressiveness and Chinese painting is also completely devoid of reproduction.

The aesthetic trend of Western painting from the medieval period to the middle and late 20th century gradually shifted from reproduction to the art language of expressiveness. Due to the progress of modern industrialization and communication in the West, it was inspired by the penetration and intersection of Western and Chinese paintings. Reproduction painting can no longer meet the needs of artists' creation, and expressive artistic language began to appear. In the middle and late twentieth century, Western modernist painting emerged. Artists abandoned the traditional art language of reproduction, which depicted the real face of the objective world, and began to explore a style of painting that was free from the objective world and completely expressed the painter's personal spiritual world. Compared with the previous realistic and figurative depictions, the subjective imagery was more powerful in expressing emotions. The artists during this period abandoned the traditional aesthetics of classicalism and realism, which were based on reproduction art, and gradually turned to expressionism, cubism and other modernist paintings [4].

Traditional Chinese figure painting promotes subjective, sensual, romantic and expressive artistic thinking, emphasizing the use of objects to express emotions and the importance of panache. It was not until after the Xinhai Revolution that Chinese painting began to shift from traditional to modern under the influence of the May Fourth New Culture Movement. Kang Youwei, Chen Duxiu, et al. advocated the use of the realistic reproduction language of Western painting science to reform the imaginative expression of thought that had been divorced from objects and expressed only spirit since the Ming and Qing dynasties, believing that it needs to return to real life for the development of art.

2. THE FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF CHINESE REALISTIC INK WASH FIGURE PAINTING

2.1 The origin of "realism"

Realism is an artistic trend that originated in France in the 19th century. The year 1848 was designated as the beginning of Realism by the famous writer Jean Fleury. It originated in France and gradually influenced various countries in Europe and Asia until now. Realism can be understood as both an artistic trend of a period and a realistic approach to art creation. With the progress of social civilization, technological development and aesthetic needs, the understanding of realism was different in each period. Italian painters of the 14th and 15th century such as Giotto and Masaccio brought out the realistic expression of man and nature, which was different from the medieval paintings. In contrast, the three Renaissance painters of the 16th century, Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael and Michelangelo, pursued perspective, anatomy and other realistic techniques with scientific ideas to represent the mythical gods in the spirit of humanism. Classicalism emerged from France in the mid to late 17th century. Classicalism attached importance to the rigorous sketching and modeling techniques, emphasizing the solemn and quiet form of painting in the composition. Neoclassicism in the mid-18th century, on the other hand, revived the ancient Greco-Roman ideal of beauty as an artistic concept, believing that art should start from reason, rejecting the expression of personal subjective emotions and directly depicting major events and heroic figures in realistic struggles, with a more realistic tendency. In the 19th century, the realist school of painting emerged in Europe to depict real life and the underclass, advocating the objective and realistic reproduction of real life and being free from the rational principles of the previous classicism and the subjectivity of romanticism.

The most representative painter of realism at that time was Courbet, whose paintings were based on the observation of real life, believing that painters should be good at discovering the environment and scenery of

their own lives, and finding the simple beauty of life to create art. This painter, who is called the "father of realism", once said, "I can't paint an angel because I've never seen him". His main masterpieces are Onan's Funeral and The Drawing Room. Among them, Onan's Funeral depicts the customary scenes of his hometown. It depicts the images such as simple peasants and indifferent clergymen, reproducing this ordinary and serious scene of life in the form of documentary painting without embellishment [5].

Realism is not only a painting technique but also a way of expression for painters to observe the world and reproduce it. The artistic spirit of facing reality, facing nature and paying more attention to real life, was a kind of innovation to the previous art, which had a great influence on the development of French and European painting.

2.2 The integration of Western "scientific" realism and "romance" of traditional Chinese painting

Throughout the history of Chinese art, figure painting has been presented in the form of subjective and romantic imagery, pursuing the beauty of mood and rhythm of brushwork and ink. Figure painting slowly shifted away from "writing spirit with form" to a painting concept that did not seek resemblance but only spirit, making the figure shape too simplified and detached from life. It was not until the 20th century that the social system changed and the politics, economy and culture changed one after another. The art field absorbed the excellent results of Western painting that were beneficial to its own development, thus creating a new cultural concept that was different from Western art and traditional Chinese painting. During the May Fourth New Culture Movement, Chen Duxiu, Cai Yuanpei, Lu Xun Ren, et al. proposed new slogans such as "literary revolution" and "art revolution" to change traditional ideas by drawing on Western realism. Their common artistic concept was to improve the traditional Chinese painting concept of detachment from real life, which only emphasized the interest of brushwork and ink, by borrowing the scientific and rigorous concept of modeling and anatomical perspective in Western painting. Kang Youwei's appeal that "Chinese painting has declined to the extreme by the end of the Qing Dynasty" showed that Chinese painting needed to be improved by the realistic approach of Western painting in order to move forward. At the same time, Chen Duxiu also put forward corresponding ideas. The pursuit of the idea that Western realistic art needed to be incorporated into traditional Chinese ink wash figure painting penetrated the minds of every artist who desperately advocated reform. However, Chinese realistic ink wash figure painting faces a great challenge - how to fuse the subjective and romantic expressive traditional ink wash figure painting with the Western realistic art, which promoted rational reproduction.

Realistic ink wash figure painting that fuses with Western realism painting really began with the emergence of Xu Beihong and Jiang Zhaohe. Xu Beihong drew on the merits of Western realistic painting with science and incorporated anatomy, perspective and light and shadow into traditional Chinese painting to make his works present a more perfect real life with realism, which were more expressive and attractive. Xu Beihong said in *The Theory of the Improvement of Chinese Painting* that "the decadence of Chinese painting has been extreme to this day", and proposed that "those who are good in ancient methods should be kept; those who are dying should be succeeded; those who are not good should be changed; those who are not enough should be added; those who can be taken into Western painting should be fused." He advocated the use of a integration of Chinese and Western painting methods to draw the advantages of Western plastic art, and this insistence on realistic art influenced the subsequent development of Chinese figure painting and promoted the process of realistic ink wash figures. He believed that the traditional figure painting "shows a person in a legalistic way, a finger without a section. The arms and legs are as straight as a cylinder, the body cannot be turned, the head cannot look up and sideways, and the hands cannot stretch towards the screen. The child becomes old when he or she smiles. A young man becomes ugly when he or she frowns. The corner of the eyes can be seen in

half of the face. When dancing, the beauty's feet are hidden [4]." Such a method can not truly express the image of the figure. Therefore, Xu Beihong proposed a new change in Chinese figure painting with the integration of East and West, the "New Seven Methods": "appropriate position, accurate proportions, the difference of black and white, natural movement or gesture, the harmony of light and heavy, the obvious character, attractive eyes". He fully applied this artistic proposition in his teaching and in his own works. This viewpoints of putting modeling first and combining with traditional ink wash broke the fixed pattern of traditional figure painting for thousands of years, which emphasized ink and brush over modeling. Xu Beihong's masterpieces include *Jiu Fanggao*, *The Foolish Old Man Who Moved the Mountains* and *Li Yinquan's Portrait*. Although his paintings do not directly represent the real life scenes of the time, they depict the perseverance and strength of the Chinese working people through allegorical methods and the use of realistic character modeling concepts. These works are basically based on line modeling and the use of light and shadow to express the sense of volume of the figures. This way of painting presents a new painting concept of using Chinese painting materials and traditional Chinese brush and ink to incorporate Western scientific realistic modeling. This way of painting, with line modeling as the main focus and structural wrinkle and rubbing as a supplement, points the way forward for the later development of Chinese realistic ink figure painting and makes a great contribution to the development of Chinese art history.

Another painter who played an important role in the development of realistic ink wash figure painting was Jiang Zhaohe. Jiang Zhaowei's realistic ink wash figure painting began in the mid-1930s, and he spent his life painting with the conviction that he had perfected Xu Beihong's revolutionary cause for Chinese figure painting. Unlike his predecessors who ignored the social reality of painting, he insisted on finding inspiration for his artistic creation in the lives of the working people at the lowest level, and oriented his ink figure painting to real life to create a new realistic Chinese painting with the traditional Chinese style. His paintings were drawn from real-life prototypes, so they were the closest to reality and the most realistic and touching. He believed that the realm of art, no matter characters, landscapes, flowers and birds, includes the three words of truth, goodness and beauty, really reflecting the reality of life. The thoughts and feelings should be true, the image should also be true, and everything starts from the truth. Goodness is a kind of spirit of doing good deeds, with being aggressive and aspiring to goodness. Beauty is the characteristic beauty of each object, and painting cannot go against the laws of nature. In his preface, Jiang Zhaohe wrote: "Not many people know me, and especially few love me. Those who know my paintings are the poor of the world, but those I sympathize with are the starving people beside the road." [1] This statement illustrates the importance of using real-life images of working people as the objects of one's paintings, and it also raises the realistic approach to traditional Chinese brushwork to a new level in ink wash figure painting. He emphasized that Western painting differs from Chinese painting because it emphasizes the realism of objects by projecting light and shadow on specific objects. In order to better integrate the accurate understanding of modeling structure in Western painting into Chinese ink wash figure painting, it is necessary to seek common ground while preserving differences and to understand the common strengths of both. For example, Western painting is concerned with scientific perspective and anatomy to understand the shape of objects, while traditional Chinese painting has the same concept that "the painter's depiction should resemble the shape of the object it reflects", only that there are differences in the method of expression, with Western painting emphasizing light and shadow, while Chinese painting is modeled by lines. Only by clarifying the similarities can the advantages of both be better integrated in practice. Jiang Zhaowei's method of expression, which combines the knowledge of modern science in Western painting and the requirements of Chinese painting, is based on line modeling, with the addition of traditional techniques such as thick and light, wrinkle and rubbing variations to form a complete set of modern realistic Chinese figure painting method with national style and mastery of modern science [2].

Xu Beihong and Jiang Zhaohe wrote a new chapter of Chinese realistic ink wash figure painting. They brought new artistic ideas and expressions to the exploration of ink and modeling in ink portrait painting, and also provided precious experience for the expression of realistic society in the creation of modern Chinese ink wash figure painting. Chinese realistic ink wash figure painting emerged along the artistic path of Xu Beihong, Jiang Zhaohe, et al., with a large number of outstanding painters with a representative and innovative sense. They created a large number of artistic works in representing the real life of the new China. Among them was Huang Zhaohong, who used the sketching brushwork to depict figures, rooted in real life to collect the highlights of painting creation, and used the painting characteristics of sketching as a creative method to accumulate painting materials. The vivid and powerful figures in his works showed the painter's strong artistic emotion of going deep into life and observing life. Liu Wenxi, who was good at expressing the rustic image of the people in northern Shaanxi, perceived life through collecting materials in his long-term in-depth life, and his thick ink and brush, brutal lines made his painting style extremely unique and representative. There was also Zhou Sicong, whose artistic influence was far-reaching. Zhou Sicong was the most outstanding female painter in the history of modern ink wash figure painting. She used her brush to reflect the real living condition of the people. She was not only satisfied with the copy of the modeling appearance, but also advocated the excavation of the inner feelings of the characters from the realistic subject matter [3]. Her works such as *The People and the Prime Minister* and *The Miners* were all permeated with concern and sympathy for the fate of the people, which made her works more appealing and greatly promoted the expression of emotion and spirit in realistic ink wash figure painting in the expression of real life.

The realistic approach incorporating scientific reproduction has strengthened the expressive power of Chinese ink wash figure painting, which largely enriched the single art form of traditional figure painting, fills the gap in the realistic art of traditional Chinese figure painting, is more in line with the new aesthetic needs of people in social development, and accelerates the development of Chinese art history.

3. THE DEVELOPMENT OF CONTEMPORARY REALISTIC INK WASH FIGURE PAINTING UNDER THE BACKGROUND OF INTEGRATION

"The brush and ink should follow the times" is the famous art theory put forward by Shi Tao, an early Qing Dynasty painter. The main point of "the brush and ink should follow the times" is "new", and "new" means innovation and renewal. The 20th century is a major period in the development of realistic ink wash figure painting. Under the influence of the new era, realistic ink wash figure painting develops a unique artistic language. Under the influence of modern Western painting and digital technology, realistic ink wash figure painting has developed in many ways. People are not satisfied with the traditional realistic painting of a single modelling depiction, but pay more and more attention to the individual language and composition of the expression, which to a certain extent forms a great visual impact. Realistic ink wash figure painting also faces a big problem at this time, that is, whether to continue the traditional realistic road of Chinese and Western integration or to change the traditional mode towards personalized road in response to the needs of the times. In fact, both of them can be changed by drawing on the mutual integration of Western realism and traditional Chinese painting. Contemporary realistic ink wash figure painting needs a new perspective and new forms of expression and content, which is in line with the fundamental artistic concept of realistic ink wash figure painting. At that time, because the traditional Chinese figure painting was lacking in the expression of real social life, the integration of realism in Western science just made up for the better development of Chinese figure painting. Art comes from life. Real life brings rich creative treasure house for artists, and artists should deeply feel the humanistic style and inner emotional spirit of life. Therefore, modern realistic ink wash figure painting should return to traditional Chinese painting under the premise of expressing today's social reality, so

that the brush and ink are in line with the reproduction. Through pictorial and spatial expressions, the integration of "science" and "romance" in the art works shows a new artistic charm. If Chinese realistic ink and wash figure painting need to adapt to the time, it needs to inherit the tradition as well as absorb the diversity of Western art styles to enrich its own development.

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