

A Brief Discussion on the Ink and Brush Fun of Character Painting

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Abstract:

Brush and ink have a profound cultural heritage in Chinese painting, and the emphasis and importance that painters place on brush and ink stem from its irreplaceable interest. This article takes figure painting as an example, and elaborates on the embodiment, foundation, and artist's spiritual connotation and personal strength of brush and ink interest from three aspects: calligraphy brush, artist's cultivation and experience, and brush and ink interest as the carrier of the artist's spiritual connotation and personal strength. The aim is to achieve a deeper understanding and recognition of brush and ink interest.

Keywords:

Brush and Ink, Character Painting, Artist's Spiritual Connotation

1. Introduction

Brush and ink have a profound cultural heritage in Chinese painting. The emphasis and importance placed on brush and ink by painters stem from its irreplaceable interest. In the process of historical evolution, this interest in brush and ink has become a place where painters' spirit and personality reside.

2. The Embodiment of the Fun Brush and Ink - Calligraphy Brushstrokes

During the Warring States period, the "Characters Riding Dragons" and "Dragon and Phoenix Characters" were depicted with strong and powerful ink lines, full of rhythm, and had already begun to take on the characteristics of line modeling.

During the Wei and Jin dynasties, figure painting was transformed by Cao Buxing, Wei Xiehe, and Gu Kaizhi. By the Southern Dynasties, such as Lu Tanwei and Zhang Sengyao, incorporating calligraphy into painting had become a conscious behavior of painters. Especially the "One stroke" created by Lu Tanwei, he drew inspiration from the cursive style of Zhang Zhi, Cui Yuan, and Du Du, using a continuous cursive calligraphy to paint, which was the beginning of calligraphy entering painting. Calligraphy and painting became an organic whole, and the painter's pursuit of ink and brush interest benefited greatly from this whole. There are two styles of

expression in Song Dynasty figure painting: meticulous and unrestrained: meticulous like regular script, such as Li Gonglin's pure ink and white painting, and unrestrained like grass, such as Liang Kai's unrestrained ink and white painting. Craftsmanship and recklessness reflect the different personalities and spiritual pursuits of creators.

The pursuit of calligraphy into painting by literati in the Yuan Dynasty exceeded that of any previous dynasty. A poem by Zhao Mengfu vividly expresses this pursuit: "Stones are like flying white wood like bamboo, and writing bamboo requires proficiency in eight techniques. If anyone can understand this, it must be noted that calligraphy and painting are the same." [1] In the Yuan Dynasty, literati like Zhao Mengfu were not only good at calligraphy, but also good at painting, so it was easier to achieve the integration of calligraphy and painting. In painting, they also emphasized the pursuit of incorporating calligraphy into painting. Zhao Mengfu's advocacy of incorporating calligraphy into painting is not limited to landscape painting and flower and bird painting, but also applies to the field of figure painting. Huang Shen and Ren Bonian were both influenced by this proposition during the Qing Dynasty. As one of the Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou, Huang Shen wrote in his self inscribed painting postscript: "Horizontal and vertical strokes on the Qi dome are not inferior to those in the human world." With his unrestrained brushwork and bold style, he portrayed the images of lower class figures such as beggars, refugees, and fishermen, and his wild brushwork vividly expressed the pursuit of ink and brush interest.

Strictly speaking, Chinese figure painting has been developing in the mode of linear brush since Nanqi Sheikh proposed the use of bony brush in the Six Laws. Since the May Fourth Movement, the reformists of traditional Chinese painting have introduced the realistic sketching method from the West into traditional Chinese ink painting. This not only changed the shortcomings of figure painting in terms of form, but also brought new changes to the presentation of ink and brush interests due to the introduction of this new element. Character painting has matured through the exploration and practice of masters such as Xu Beihong, Jiang Zhaohe, Zhou Sicong, Wang Ziwu, and Zhao Jiancheng, transforming the light and shadow structure of Western realistic sketching into meaningful and expressive brushwork. The interest generated by this brushwork is full of the brilliance of rational spirit.

During the Tang Dynasty, Zhang Yanyuan said, "Bone spirit and form are both rooted in the original intention and return to the brush, so many painters are good at calligraphy." [2] The interest in brush and ink is closely related to the calligraphic writing, and the integration of calligraphic writing makes the interest in brush and ink more abundant and profound. Therefore, without investment in calligraphy, brush and ink often become mere formalities, lacking interest, and the depth of painting works will be lacking. Of course, we cannot unilaterally emphasize the integration of calligraphy into painting, while neglecting the grasp of the overall atmosphere and style of the image, which also involves the issue of artist cultivation.

3. The Foundation of Ink and Brush Fun - Artist's Cultivation and Experience

In figure painting, the vividness of artistic images cannot be separated from the interest in brushwork. However, the acquisition of this interest is not achieved overnight, as it is related to the artist's aesthetic concepts, technical language, personal emotions, and understanding of objective things, as well as their personality,

experience, knowledge, cultivation, and mentality. Dong Qichang's proposal of "traveling thousands of miles and reading thousands of books" in the Ming Dynasty highlights the importance of artistic cultivation and experience in artistic creation. In the development of Chinese painting over thousands of years, although it has achieved brilliant achievements, also has formed many formulaic drawbacks, which have become obstacles to the vividness of artistic images and the enjoyment of brushwork. To break these barriers, artists must delve into real life, draw creative inspiration from it, and create vivid artistic images and cultivated brushwork enjoyment.

During the War of Resistance Against Japan, figurative painters stepped out of their study rooms and onto the streets, actively participating in the wave of saving the nation and survival. They drew nourishment from the hardships of war and used simple and realistic artistic language to depict the suffering of ordinary people. Starting from the perspective of national emotions, they broke the rigid pattern of traditional figurative painting, completed the transition from the "small self" to the "big self", and achieved the extension and rebirth of the bloodline of national painting. A gap has been opened in the closed and stable traditional literati painting system, allowing the water source of real life to be injected into it. As a result, the brushwork of figure painting has been separated from formulaic and conceptual elements, presenting a vitality and a fun that is different from tradition. For example, Ye Yinquan's "Anti Japanese War Refugee Picture" created during the Anti Japanese War is his own true experience as a refugee. The picture is vivid and touching, and although the character design is not as rigorous as Jiang Zhaohe's "Refugee Picture", the brushwork can touch the viewer's heartstrings and evoke sympathy. This is the result of artists infiltrating society, breathing with the times, and sharing the same fate.

The painting "Leaving Bayan Har" created by the figure painter Li Bo'an is a huge scroll that he spent ten years, delving into Tibet and daily life countless times, and changing his drafts to create. This masterpiece goes beyond the pursuit of small strokes, emotions, and fun. With its unique form and skillful language, as well as its imposing and majestic momentum, it embodies the grand and majestic spirit of our nation. If it were not for Mr. Li Bo'an's in-depth understanding and observation of life, his passionate inner world, and his admiration for the spirit of the Chinese nation, this classic masterpiece would not have appeared in the history of Chinese art.

The reason why the works of Ye Yinquan and Li Bo'an can move viewers is that their brushwork is not imitative, but comes from real life, and their skills are closely related to reality. For painters, this is an essential cultivation. Each type of painting has its own unique techniques and methods of expression, and figure painting is no exception. If the acquisition of ink and brush interest is based on high difficulty techniques, then this interest will have an endless aftertaste. Whether an artist has originality is often judged through this high difficulty technique, because high difficulty techniques are a combination of the artist's emotions, life, aesthetic concepts, and rational cognition. This comprehensive cultivation has an important impact on the cultivation and style of brush and ink taste.

The book "A Brief Introduction to Painting" by Tang Dai of the Qing Dynasty believes that "painting is profound and vast, with subtle changes, and is well prepared for the times, people, geography, and physical phenomena. The ancients were gifted with wisdom, able to see the vastness of things, read everything in their books, and understand everything in their theories. They were able to grasp the three mysteries in their paintings, so the words and characters in their books became the key and the

ladder for future generations. Therefore, those who learn painting should read them first... With eternal thoughts in their hearts, and a vertical and horizontal posture in their wrists, standing outside the painting, intentionally painting, and splashing ink and brush strokes, all became the charm of heaven. The achievement of reading cannot be underestimated!" [3] Being able to appreciate emotions and wisdom, adding a touch of elegance to the artwork. The influence of reading on painting is indirect, and it will subtly influence the temperament and creative activities of artists, thereby affecting the quality and interest of their brushwork. It can be seen that reading is also an important way to improve the cultivation of artists.

In contemporary society, the wave of commodity economy is sweeping through every corner of life, and the lack of faith has made people's hearts restless and impatient, making the pursuit of quick success and instant benefits a major problem in contemporary social life. How artists who do not live in a vacuum can maintain their independence and improve their self-cultivation is an unavoidable issue for artists of this era. Truly tasteful, thoughtful, and profound art has always been closely related to real life, superb skills, and extensive knowledge. So, for an artist with comprehensive cultivation, life, skills, and knowledge are all indispensable parts, and the production of ink and brush interest cannot be separated from the artist's cultivation and life experience. In the Qing Dynasty, Shi Tao said, "Ink is not effective without nurturing, and pen is not lively without life." [4] An artist who delves into life and is close to it must be a responsible and accountable person, an artist with superb skills, in order to truly and sincerely integrate their emotions and knowledge into the fun of brush and ink, and create high-quality artistic works.

4. The Interest in Brushwork is the Carrier of the Artist's Spiritual Connotation and Personal Strength

Traditional Chinese figure painting has historically played a role in moral education, serving as a means of nurturing and helping people's relationships. As Cao Zhi once said, "Those who observe paintings admire the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors, mourn the Three Seasons' Strange Masters, gnash their teeth when they see usurpers and thieves, remember to eat when they see noble and virtuous officials, resist when loyal officials die, sigh when they release their sons and daughters, look sideways when they see lascivious men and jealous women, and appreciate the beauty of imperial concubines. As a result, artists have shifted their focus from moral education to venting their emotions and expressing themselves." [5] With the rise of literati painting, artists have begun to focus on painting. The shift from other provinces to one's own inner self reveals the spiritual connotation and personal strength of artists in the interest of brushwork. For example, during the Southern Song Dynasty, Liang Kai was a key painter in the transition from figure painting to ink painting. Liang Kai's behavior was bizarre and he was not bound by etiquette. The emperor once gave him a golden belt symbolizing the highest honor, but Liang Kai did not accept it and hung it in the courtyard, drifting away, completely unwilling to be controlled by others. The "Taibai Xingyin Tu" and the "Splashing Ink Immortal Tu" are his two representative works. The former vividly depicts the poet's graceful and elegant demeanor with just a few strokes, while the latter uses a wide brush of splashing ink to horizontally and vertically sweep, with ink colors flowing freely and depicting the drunken state of people and things in a free and unrestrained state. Liang Kai's figure painting has taken a unique path and achieved a new height in reflecting the charm of characters. It has also broken free from the narrow space of moral education, breaking the shackles

of difficult expression of ink and brush interest in figure painting, and greatly expanding the expression of the spiritual connotation of ink and wash figure painters. However, due to the fact that figure painting is not as expressive, skillful, and content as flower and bird painting and landscape painting, and is easier for literati painters to express their emotions and aspirations, ink figure painting has not made significant progress since Liang Kai. But the spiritual connotation and personal strength of painters have greatly developed in flower, bird, and landscape paintings, especially in the Yuan Dynasty. Due to the suppression of Han intellectuals by Mongolians, literati painters placed their emotions on brush and ink, such as Zheng Suonan's rootless orchid, Gong Kai's emaciated horse, and Ni Zan's desolate and desolate landscape. In the brushwork of these painters, there is always a sense of humor - although this humor is poignant and desolate, revealing the vicissitudes of life. The ink grapes in the wild vines depicted by the Ming Dynasty painter Xu Wei also reveal the sense of loss and sourness of "the pearl on the bottom of the pen has nowhere to sell"; Some of the works of the Eight Great Mountains people in the Qing Dynasty, painted horizontally and vertically, are also full of confessions of the pain of the downfall of the country, with "not many ink dots and many tears".

As history entered the 20th century, with the introduction of Western scientific anatomy, not only did it expand the expressive power of traditional brushwork in figure painting, but it also made up for the lack of visual effects in figure painting, breaking out of the vicious circle of inbreeding, and thus elevating and highlighting the aesthetic characteristics of this painting genre. The artist combined the beneficial elements of Western painting with the calligraphic nature of traditional Chinese painting, creating a new pattern of colorful figure painting creation. From the perspective of national emotions, figure painters express their understanding, comprehension, and love for life, society, and art through their respective brushstrokes, showcasing their spiritual connotations and personal strength with their different ink tastes and rhymes. For example, Mr. Jiang Zhaohe's "Portrait of Refugees" abandons the leisurely demeanor of literati and officials with a strong humanitarian spirit, "cooking a bowl of bitter tea and presenting it to the public." [6] Mr. Zhou Sicong's "Portrait of Mining Workers" combines her experience of suffering and tragedy, blending her own heart, emotions, and pen ink into one. Mr. Zhao Jiancheng is an artist with a sense of social responsibility and historical mission. In his series of works "Records of the Elders", he created an artistic language that is different from traditional literati, and surpassed the techniques of integrating Chinese and Western styles. With his unique brush and ink language, he endowed the people and objects in his paintings with soul and vitality, becoming a symbol of the realistic height of ink figure painting in the new era.

5. Conclusions

Brush and ink are not just a matter of general technique. If brush and ink are only regarded as accessories to technique, they will inevitably be empty and uninteresting. Brush and ink have been endowed with profound cultural heritage in their long-term development and evolution. If one blindly plays with brush and ink techniques and ignores the cultural heritage behind the fun of brush and ink, the ideological and artistic qualities of artistic works will inevitably become shallow, and the expression of the artist's spiritual connotation and personal strength will wander in a foreign land.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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