

On the Inheritance and Materialization of Brush and Ink from Shen Zhou's "Album of Landscapes in Wuzhong"

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ABSTRACT

The success of great painters in any era is not accidental. Later generations focus on their remarkable artistic achievements and admire their outstanding accomplishments in art. However, few people pay attention to why they became excellent artists of their time. This article takes the pure ink landscape painting work "Album of Landscapes in Wuzhong" by Shen Zhou, a famous painter in the Ming Dynasty and the leader of the Wumen School of Painting, as an example, and is supplemented by the works of famous painters in the Song and Yuan Dynasties and other representative landscape paintings of Shen Zhou to analyze and study the inheritance and changes of Shen Zhou's brush and ink in landscape paintings.

KEYWORDS

Brush and Ink; Inheritance; Change

As is well known, brush and ink are the core of Chinese painting. Since the Wei and Jin Dynasties, many famous artists have their own views. Da Chongguang said: "Ink takes the brush as its skeleton, and the brush takes the ink as its essence" (Hua Quan). Tong Zhongtao wrote in his book "What Does Chinese Painting Paint": "Chinese painting forms an 'image' with 'brush and ink'... The form of brush and ink in Chinese painting has two aspects of content. One is called 'using the brush' and 'using the ink', briefly called 'brush' and 'ink', and collectively called 'brush and ink', including the use of the writing brush and ink and their traces on materials such as paper, that is, dots and strokes." Huang Binhong, a famous modern painter, once said, "What changes is the appearance, and what remains unchanged is the spirit." The brush and ink of Chinese painting carry the spirit of the Chinese nation. Thus, the importance of brush and ink can be seen.

1 Inheritance of Brush and Ink

1.1 A Glimpse of the Vast World in a Small Painting

In seal carving art, the saying "A miss is as good as a mile" is often used to describe that in the process of seal carving, if there is a slight error in dots and strokes, serious mistakes will occur. Because seal carving art is to carve complicated and intricate seal characters on a limited flat space, so this description is used. Similarly, in a landscape painting, within the limited expressive scale, by using the unique composition and layout of Chinese landscape paintings, it is also possible to express the majestic scenery of thousands of miles of mountains and rivers.

In the landscape paintings of the Song Dynasty, whether it is a magnificent work like "Early Spring" or the small album paintings of the Song Dynasty (such as "Misty Haze over the Water Village" and Chen Qingbo's "Spring Dawn of the Lakes and Mountains"), they all show the viewers the grand scenery of thousands of miles of mountains and rivers, making people feel awe-inspiring in the face of towering mountains; or the vast expanse of misty waves and continuous mountains, such a vast scene makes people feel extremely comfortable instantly. The compositional atmosphere of Shen Zhou's "Lofty Mount Lu" can be regarded as coming from the style of "Dingtianlidi" (standing between heaven and earth) or "monumental style" of the Song people. The fourth, fifth, eighth, and twelfth frames of Shen Zhou's "Album of Landscapes in Wuzhong" are also created according to the compositional rule of mountains rising abruptly from the ground and piercing the clouds. Similarly, Shen Zhou, with a limited expressive space, uses extremely simple brush and ink and composition to express the infinite vitality of the mountains and rivers, which is highly poetic.

In the Song Dynasty, the ethos of Neo-Confucianism prevailed, and its concept of "investigating things to acquire knowledge" had a certain influence on artistic creation. The landscape paintings of the Song people especially paid attention to the "realistic representation" of nature. They observed everything in life meticulously, and the depiction of trees, the structure of rocks, the forms of people, and the construction of houses were extremely realistic and artistic, such as "Travelers among Mountains and Streams".

In Shen Zhou's "Album of Landscapes in Wuzhong", the extension and interweaving of the branches of trees, the outlining of the house structure, the boats in the river, and the expressions of the postures of pedestrians in the mountains, although the brushstrokes are hasty, still maintain the rigor of "the laws of things". It is obvious that Shen Zhou carefully observed everything around him in daily life.

1.2 Inheritance of the Brushwork Meaning of Huang Gongwang's Pi Ma Cun (Hemp-fiber Texture Stroke)

The artistic expression of Pi Ma Cun can be traced back to Dong Yuan and Ju Ran, followed by Huang Gongwang and Wu Zhen in the Yuan Dynasty. Huang Gongwang's Pi Ma Cun is different from that of Dong Yuan and Ju Ran; Wu Zhen's is similar to that of Dong Yuan and Ju Ran, and we will discuss it later. Under the entire cultural and political atmosphere of the Yuan Dynasty, many Han literati who lived in seclusion advocated Taoism. Both Huang Gongwang and Ni Zan advocated Taoism and were deeply influenced by Taoist thoughts. Huang Gongwang's masterpiece "Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains" was given to his junior fellow apprentice after it was completed, and then it was passed on to Shen Zhou's hands and collected by Shen Zhou. Shen Zhou cherished "Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains" very much. After it was lost, he copied it from memory. From this, it can be seen how much effort Shen Zhou put into "Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains" in his daily life.

The Taoist theory of human nature with emptiness and tranquility as its content, in terms of self-cultivation, those who were deeply influenced by Lao Tzu in later generations were mostly cunning officials who practiced the art of yin and softness; those who were deeply influenced by Zhuang Tzu were mostly hermits who were willing to live a carefree life (from Xu Fuguan's "The Spirit of Chinese Art"). It can be seen that the word "emptiness and tranquility" represents the highest spiritual state of having no desires. Thus, it can also be extended to an aesthetic attitude towards art.

There is no need to discuss too much about Huang Gongwang's identity and life situation. From Shen Zhou's life experience, we can know that he came from a wealthy family and did not have to worry about the source of his livelihood. Moreover, Shen Zhou was easy-going and kind-hearted. It was precisely such a personality and the cultural and artistic atmosphere of his family that shaped Shen Zhou. Huang Gongwang's "Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains" uses thick and vigorous brushstrokes, with a free and unrestrained style. The lines of Pi Ma Cun are flexible and changeable, and the ink is light and clear. Judging from the scroll of "Copying Huang Gongwang's Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains" copied by Shen Zhou, although the use of brush and ink is different, in terms of artistic charm, it is still quite similar. From Shen Zhou's "Album of Landscapes in Wuzhong", the shadow of Huang Gongwang can be seen in all twelve paintings. The expression of brushstrokes is more straightforward, and the use of ink is more unrestrained.

1.3 Reconstruction of Wang Meng's Brush and Ink Texture Strokes

Wang Meng's landscape paintings were influenced by Ju Ran. Different from Ju Ran, his brushstrokes are not fine, and the lines become more complicated. The texture strokes are stacked layer by layer like ox hair, so there is the term "Niu Mao Cun" (Ox-hair Texture Stroke), and the other is Jie Suo Cun (Unraveled Rope Texture Stroke). Although his texture strokes seem lively and vivid, they often give people an overwhelming, vigorous and thick momentum, such as his "Seclusion in Qingbian Mountain", "Summer Mountain Residence", and "Ge Zhichuan's Relocation". Judging from the brush and ink of many of Shen Zhou's early and middle-period landscape paintings, his landscape paintings were deeply influenced by Wang Meng, such as "Lofty Mount Lu" and "Album of Dongzhuang" (some works). Then, in his own "Album of Landscapes in Wuzhong", Shen Zhou gave a new interpretation and expression of Wang Meng's texture strokes, brush and ink, etc.

1.4 Inheritance of the Brush and Ink of Dong Yuan, Ju Ran and Wu Zhen

As mentioned above, the brush and ink of Wu Zhen's landscape paintings are similar to those of Dong Yuan and Ju Ran. From Ju Ran's works such as "Layers of Rocks and Clusters of Trees" and "Inquiring about the Tao in the Autumn Mountains", it can be seen that Ju Ran's texture strokes are relatively dense, and there are traces of layer-by-layer accumulation of ink. There are not many landscape paintings of Wu Zhen that have been passed down to this day, and most of them take "Fishermen" and the like as themes, and most of them are vertical paintings. What is different from Dong Yuan and Ju Ran is that Wu Zhen's landscape paintings use more moisture in the brushstrokes, and the brushstrokes are relatively wet. He uses wet brushes with rich ink to accumulate layer by layer, making the painting look very delicate and thick, with a feeling of dripping ink, such as "Fisherman" and "Fishing Hermit in Dongting Lake". From the perspective of the use of brush and ink and the changes in style, the first, fourth, seventh, eighth, and eleventh works in Shen Zhou's "Album of Landscapes in Wuzhong" are similar to Wu Zhen in terms of the use of brush and ink, but also have some differences.

2 Materialization of Shen Zhou's Brush and Ink

2.1 Breakthrough in the Use of the Brush

The quality of ink application is entirely related to the use of the brush (from "Huang Binhong's Painting Quotes").

Huang Binhong also has the theory of "Five Brushes and Seven Inks", where "Five Brushes" refer to "smoothness, roundness, retention, weight, and change". In my opinion, this is the best summary of traditional brushwork by Huang Binhong. Judging from the style of the inscriptions on Shen Zhou's many artworks, Shen Zhou was a loyal fan of Huang Tingjian. Later generations said that Huang Tingjian's running script was like "long spears and big halberds", and Su Dongpo once said: "Sometimes the brushwork is too thin, almost like a snake hanging on a treetop" (Su Dongpo's postscript on Huang Tingjian's cursive script).

It was precisely because Shen Zhou had proficient calligraphy skills that he was able to use the brush very freely in his artistic creation. This freedom in using the brush can be strongly proven whether from Shen Zhou's "Album of Landscapes in Wuzhong" or from his other landscape paintings in his later period. Shen Zhou seems to have broken the monotony of the texture strokes in Chinese painting. In Shen Zhou's landscape paintings, the axe-cut texture strokes and Pi Ma Cun can be very harmoniously integrated into one, forming a seamless whole.

In addition, in Shen Zhou's landscape paintings, his superb ability in using the brush can also be reflected in the expression of the dots and moss on the rocks, as well as the calligraphic expression of the left and right extension and interweaving of the trees and branches. The dots and moss of Shen Zhou have the same direction or echo each other, making the painting look very lively; the brushstrokes of the dots are like "stones falling from a high mountain", making the painting more profound; the expression of the dots and moss, with the rhythm of density and the changes of light and dark, not only enriches the painting but also makes the language of the brushstrokes in the painting more mature. The expression of the lines of the trees and branches with the meaning of calligraphic writing is the best interpretation of Zhao Mengfu's poem "Stones are like flying white, and trees are like seal script. Drawing bamboo should also follow the eight methods. If someone can understand this, they should know that calligraphy and painting are originally the same" (from "Zhao Mengfu's Nesting Trees and Bamboo Rocks in the Yuan Dynasty").

2.2 Exploration in the Use of Ink

As mentioned before: "Ink takes the brush as its skeleton, and the brush takes the ink as its essence" (from Da Chongguang's "Hua Quan"). This means that the brush and ink complement each other. There is also the saying "Color does not interfere with ink, ink does not interfere with color, and color and ink complement each other", which illustrates the relationship between the brush and ink, and between the brush and ink and color.

Taking Shen Zhou's landscape painting "Album of Landscapes in Wuzhong" (a total of twelve frames) as an example, all of them are ink on paper (with a size of 28.5cmX25.5cm). The dry and wet brushstrokes are used to express the virtual and real, dense and sparse changes of the rocks and trees; then different ink tones are used to more clearly express the yin and yang sides of the outlined rocks, and then light ink is used for rendering, which is extremely moist, making the painting look more ethereal. It also reflects the unique charm of the brush and ink of Chinese landscape paintings.

2.3 Expression of the Quiet Artistic Conception with Brush and Ink

The second and eleventh frames of the "Album of Landscapes in Wuzhong" use dense trees as the foreground, and light ink is used to express the hazy background, which is extremely poetic, just like the scene described in Wang Wei's poem "There is no rain on the mountain path, but the empty greenness wets people's clothes" (from Wang Wei's poem "In the Mountains" in the Tang Dynasty). This also confirms the saying that "painting is a silent poem".

In the album of "Album of Landscapes in Wuzhong", Shen Zhou uses pure ink expression techniques, with a grand and unrestrained or horizontal and profound layout, and uses limited brush and ink to express the infinite artistic conception, reflecting the "quiet" and "silent" artistic conception of landscape paintings. It is also an expression of the "empty and quiet" realm of the literati's inner world.

3 Conclusion

Artists engaged in the creation of Chinese painting art all know that when learning from traditional classic artworks, we should not only focus on the surface skills but also pay attention to studying the internal cultural connotations behind the artworks. Through the exploration of the brush and ink in Shen Zhou's "Album of Landscapes in Wuzhong", we can understand the relationship between traditional brush and ink elements and the expression of personal temperament. We can realize that the brush and ink of Chinese painting carry the national cultural spirit, and tradition is the cornerstone of the continuous progress in the development history of Chinese painting. Without a profound understanding and research of traditional landscape paintings, the expression of personal personality will become like a house without a foundation. At present, we should maintain our national cultural confidence. While inheriting and carrying forward national culture, we should actively explore our own ways of expressing brush and ink and create artistic works that can

reflect the sense of the times of the great and beautiful China.

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