

Research on the Aesthetic Connotation of Line Quality in Traditional Chinese Painting

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ABSTRACT

In the field of calligraphy and painting, line quality refers to the lines that flexibly express the texture and quality of things, the criterion of which is whether the artistic image presented by the lines is consistent with the characteristics of the original thing. In traditional Chinese painting, the subtlety of the use of painting skills is the key standard to measure the line quality, and the appreciation of the line quality is also one of the core elements of appreciating traditional Chinese painting. From different perspectives, lines in Chinese painting have different aesthetic connotations, which can not only convey calm, strength, softness and fortitude to people, but also express the artist's emotional attitude toward life, nature and all things through the shape, direction and rhythm of the lines, so as to trigger the emotional resonance with the audience. In conclusion, in traditional Chinese painting, lines are not only a form of artistic expression, but also a carrier of beauty, which integrates the unique aesthetic thoughts of the Chinese nation and becomes the unique artistic language of traditional Chinese painting.

KEYWORDS

traditional Chinese painting; line; aesthetic connotation

Different from the "thick and heavy in color" of Western oil painting, traditional Chinese painting is influenced by Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism to show the characteristics of "nature appreciation, agility and subtlety", and strive to achieve the realm of "blending of mind and matter". This kind of implicit, euphemistic and philosophical aesthetic psychology makes many Chinese painters form a kind of soft and gentle feelings in the process of creation, and "expressing ambitions and emotions but not things" has become the common pursuit of painters. Painters gradually apply this free and romantic spirit to the expression of line quality. They use long or short, thick or light, or rigid or soft lines to carry the "romantic charm" of artistic images, in order to express their unique aesthetic tastes.

1 Start from the Line, the Beauty of Space Structure in Traditional Chinese Painting

Lines are one of the basic elements in traditional Chinese painting. The creation of traditional Chinese painting is basically "starting from the line", and dilutes the impact of color on the image, so that the image can present a "minimalist and cool" meaning. Confucianism advocates simplicity, and painters influenced by it also hope to educate people's character through art expression. Therefore, in painting works, these painters always follow the principle with "few rather than more", and expect to achieve the painting realm of "simple lines but complete images"^[1]. This painting method of "simplicity driving complexity" is very common in the space structure of painting. It uses

urgent or slow, light or heavy, thick or light lines to build abstract and grand artistic conception. Although the viewer is presented with a static painting, the simple lines can stimulate the viewers' imagination and make them feel a rich and vivid dynamic image driven by their inner emotions, thus quickly resonating with the artist emotionally. For example, Ma Yuan's painting "Fishing Alone in the Winter" in the Song Dynasty depicts a boat floating on the water and an old man fishing alone. In the long view, the artist uses only a few strokes to describe the microwaves on the water surface, and the rest of the painting is blank, thus creating a cold and desolate atmosphere.

Traditional Chinese painting is deeply influenced by the Taoist ideas of "Yin and Yang" and "the unity of heaven and man", which also determines the unique expression of lines in traditional Chinese painting. The creation of traditional Chinese painting has never been to use lines to simply depict the image characteristics of the outline of the scenes, but is a kind of "re-creation" after the integration of self-cognitive emotion. This "re-creation" starts from the depths of the painters' mind, which means that "the handwriting is the mind". In fact, there is no line among all thing in heaven and earth. The use of lines in painting is to "detach" specific scenes from the background. And in order to use lines to "detach" the scenery from the background, painters need to rely on their own sense of objective things to give lines a variety of shapes, such as "thickness or thinness", "empty and solid", "thickness and thinness", "square or circle", "connection or disconnection", "curvature or straightness", etc. Through the contrast and symbiosis, the unique aesthetic interest of the Chinese nation is expressed. Just as in Ma Yuan's painting of Fishing Alone in the Winter, the artist endows the lines with rich emotions and "semantic meanings", integrates his own longing for calm and quiet and the pursuit of "the greatest truths being the simplest", and finally sketches out a space image with unique aesthetic conception by using only a few strokes of lines^[2].

2 Create Momentum by the Line, the Beauty of Image and Artistic Conception in Traditional Chinese Painting

Since the Yuan Dynasty, the creation and development of traditional Chinese painting have undergone a great turning point, and painters have put forward a new point of view on "painting skills". For example, Zhao Mengfu proposes the "homogeneity of calligraphy and painting", and advocates the combination of superb and elegant calligraphy and painting creation, which pushes traditional Chinese painting to a new level

Calligraphy is also composed of a variety of line combinations and changes, and shares a similar charm with painting creation. Therefore, the application of calligraphy in the creation of painting can "create momentum" for painting works. For example, the painting skills in Zhao Mengfu's painting of Autumn Colors on the Que and Hua Mountains imitate Dong Yuan's calligraphic style and the technique of calligraphy in the regular script. The overall painting style is beautiful and simple, as well as smart and natural. The trunks are only drawn by two strokes of lines, and the leaves are only depicted ink dots. The fine and soft technique of drawing perfectly outlines the ups and downs of mountains, and the whole picture presented is in line with the characteristics of the regular script of "straight and simple, as well as square and neat strokes"^[3]. The image does not use heavy colors, but only use changes in the shade of lines to outline the elements such as plains, mangroves, fishing boats and houses. The lines are no longer a form of art to simply shape the image, but more to express the main characteristics of the artistic image, and finally make the image show a fresh and refined style and artistic conception. The "line drawing" technique is the highest state of the "vivacious artistic conception". In the painting of Autumn Colors on the Que and Hua Mountains, there seems to be a flowing "power" in the neat, delicate and changeable lines, and the painter's thoughts and interests are interspersed in the beginning, continuing, changing,

concluding, main, auxiliary and breaking lines. The combination of lines is no longer a simple description, but uses the lines in calligraphy to “write”, and use the ever-changing strokes to express their own feelings. Thus, the connection of “line” and “artistic conception” in traditional Chinese painting makes the image show a unique beauty of artistic conception.

3 Show the Vividness by the Line, the Beauty of Interests and Artistic Conceptions in Traditional Chinese Painting

“Vividness” is another important feature of traditional Chinese painting. Objectively, in order to depict dynamic things vividly on static paper, painters not only need to have a high talent in painting art, but also need to be good at observing life and have the ability to analyze and summarize. In this way, they can use a few simple lines to perfectly present the characteristics of the images of things and achieve the effect of “vividness”. For traditional Chinese painting, in addition to the “vividness” of the artistic form, the “vividness” of the spiritual image is also a very important content. If there is only forms but no images, the whole picture will be lifeless, dull and boring. In order to truly achieve the “unity of spirit and body”, it is necessary to strengthen the training of line construction skills.

For example, in the Qing Dynasty, the image of Lu Yingshan’s painting of “Cockfighting” does not have much color. In this painting, two cocks are mainly composed of black and white lines, and only the comb is red. This painting can have the effect of “vividness” not entirely because of the artist’s vivid description of the image of the two cocks. The reason is that the artist pays attention to the image depiction, and vividly portrays the fierce and heroic spirit of the two cocks, so that the viewer can feel a “tension and vibrant” atmosphere and vitality. In the creation of traditional Chinese painting, different lines contain artists’ understanding and views of different things, and inevitably pour artists’ emotional expressions of the artistic images. In the painting works with clear style and light rhythm, the change of line tracks is always smooth and gentle. In the painting works that express the cold and dark resentment, the lines must also be resolute and solemn, and the so-called “the same description of emotions and images” is this truth^[4]. Therefore, in the appreciation of traditional Chinese painting lines, we can also intuitively feel the artists’ aesthetic aspirations. In the process of painting, based on their own summary of the image characteristics of objective things and their own subjective ideas, painters will apply flexible creativity to long or short, thick or light, strong or weak, or straight or curved lines, and finally present paintings that can show both artistic image characteristics and their own aesthetic interests.

4 Hand down by the Line, the Beauty of Vigorous Life in Traditional Chinese Painting

Traditional Chinese painting has a long history, and the role of lines is also from the initial outline of the image, shaping the physical characteristics to the later expression of aspirations and feelings. The lines have always been accompanied by the continuous change of the Chinese nation’s concept of etiquette, religion and aesthetic concepts to develop, and carried the unique aesthetic philosophy of the Chinese nation. As an important form of artistic expression in traditional Chinese painting, lines are extracted from objective objects and combines the artists’ own aesthetic tastes. It not only carries the history of the Chinese nation, but also constantly innovates and transforms with the changes of history. Finally, traditional Chinese painting can maintain its youthful vitality forever and can pass through the ancient and modern times at any time and under any

circumstances. The twists and turns of the lines connect the painters with the viewers, and make viewers feel the vigorous vitality of life in the painting works.

Taking Gu Kaizhi's painting of Nymph of the Luo River in the Eastern Jin Dynasty as an example, the most beautiful thing in the whole painting is not the amazing appearance of the nymph of the Luo River and the dream-like scenery, but the soul-stirring affection that has lasted for thousands of years, and the sadness that the man and the nymph can not be kept together. In the process of painting, the artist not only simply depicts the story, but also takes the painting as the pen to integrates his regret for Cao Zhi and the nymph of the Luo River who love each other but cannot be together. Every line and every stroke are full of life and spirit, and finally lifelike objects and portraits can be created, so that people after thousands of years can still be unaffected by the influence of time and foreign objects when appreciating the Nymph of the Luo River, resonate with the artist through his delicate brushwork, and feel the romantic feelings. Just as Ji Xianlin said in his evaluation of traditional Chinese painting: "The minimalism of traditional Chinese painting is beyond words"^[5]. The "minimalism" here means that the creation of traditional Chinese painting abandons other superfluous elements, but only uses lines to depict objectives, state aspirations and express emotions. The application and forms of lines are closely related to the vitality and spiritual connotation of the painting works, and show the beauty of vigorous life of traditional Chinese painting in multiple dimensions.

5 Conclusion

To sum up, line, as one of the most basic elements in traditional Chinese painting, not only has the effect of "depicting objectives", but also assumes the function of stating aspirations and expressing emotions. The every line in traditional Chinese painting is full of intelligence and life, which not only creates a vivid image, but also conveys the painters' thoughts and emotions, and highlights the unique aesthetic thoughts of the Chinese nation. While creating a spiritual realm with endless aftertaste, the lines can also give viewers a certain imagination space, so that viewers can also follow the flow and change of the lines to feel the profound artistic conception contained in traditional Chinese painting. In the future development of traditional Chinese painting, the core position of the lines is still unshakable. Appreciation and evaluation of the line quality will continue to inspire people, nourish the spirit, and help traditional Chinese painting move towards a more brilliant development.

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