



Research on the Reference of Traditional Ink Painting Elements in Chinese Watercolor Painting

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Abstract. In today's art landscape, only some painting types can maintain their original state without absorbing other painting languages and exist alone. The commonality and mutual integration of different types of paintings make each easel painting absorb and learn from each other, presenting an eclectic and diversified development trend in the field of painting, which makes the personalized language form more room for development. Ink painting is China's national quintessence, with a long history and glorious achievements. The painting procedure of watercolor itself is becoming more and more incompatible with our current era, and it is insufficient in expressing the author's thoughts, emotions and will, so there are waves of experimental changes in watercolor painting one after another. Watercolor paintings from the West are integrated with traditional Chinese culture, forming an excellent example of combining Chinese and Western cultures. The elements of traditional Chinese painting have significantly impacted the creation of Chinese watercolor painting. The pursuit of artistic conception in the traditional painting makes watercolor painting more distinctive and forms a unique artistic outlook. This article compares and analyzes traditional Chinese ink painting and watercolor painting from multiple levels, trying to find the characteristics of the two and the possibility of combining them theoretically. In the further exploration of integrating Chinese brush and ink into watercolor painting, traditional factors have played an essential role in it, showing a unique artistic charm. This article intends to discuss the integration relationship with watercolor painting from various aspects, such as the historical background, technical level, and cultural theory.

Keywords: Watercolor Painting · Chinese Painting · Reference · Fusion

1 Introduction

Watercolor painting is a kind of painting that is drawn on watercolor paper with water as the medium and mixed with watercolor paints. Despite being an ancient painting medium potentially originated since paleolithic Europe, watercolor painting has only gained its popularity since the 18th and 19th century. Being a Western painting method similar to oil painting, watercolor focuses on depicting the true form and aesthetics of the objective world, which exhibits significant difference with the traditional Chinese painting.

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However, the art form can form distinctive and unique artistic characteristics due to the uncertainty of water flow. The painter can control the painting's color by directly adding specific amount of water, which coincides with the characteristics exhibits in traditional Chinese painting. In creating traditional Chinese painting, the focus is on the role of "brush" and "ink," while the use of water as a diluent also plays a vital role in the picture. Therefore, brush, ink, and water occupy prominent crucial positions. With such natural similarities, watercolor was meant to embark on the road of integration with Chinese ink painting at the moment watercolor was introduced to China. China's profound traditional culture provides cultural support for the development of watercolor painting. The traditional techniques and skills of Chinese painting in applying brush and ink in its unique combinations provide a space for skill transformation for the development of watercolor painting, making watercolor present on the world cultural and artistic stage with its unique artistic style in just one hundred years in China.

The diverse incorporation of traditional elements of Chinese painting in watercolor drawing has been developed by masters for decades. Being one of the first pioneers to go to Europe to learn Western painting, Li Tiefu combined superb Western painting skills with Chinese art to create watercolor paintings that fully embodies the national style using Chinese brushes and rice paper in his famous works like "Sichuan Emei". On the other hand, the contemporary painter Tao Shihu's Snow Scene series "Afterglow at Twilight" combines Eastern and Western concepts, absorbing the meticulous painting style of the Song and Yuan Dynasties to pursue metaphysical mysterious space of Taoist thoughts. It is precisely because the tools and taste of watercolor are similar to traditional Chinese ink painting. Western watercolor painting has reached a tacit agreement with the implicit and euphemistic aesthetic psychology of the Asian people, emphasizing meaning over form so that the critical concepts in traditional Chinese painting constitutes the essence of Chinese watercolor painting.

2 Differences Between Western Watercolor and Traditional Chinese Painting

Although watercolor painting originated in continental Europe, it developed and matured in England and formed a system introduced to China at the end of the century. Watercolor is characterized by its pure color, transparent color, affirmation with pen, bright and light picture, changeable, transparent, and flowing characteristics formed by the perfect combination of water and color, and can highlight the fantastic artistic realm. Painters are fascinated, admired, and fanatically pursued. It is often praised as "lyric poetry" and "light music" in painting. People also love watercolor art because of its unique, graceful, and mild language [1].

On the other hand, traditional Chinese painting generally refers to paintings made on rice paper or silk with brushes, ink, and Chinese paints. It is one of the traditional plastic arts in China. Chinese painting is rooted in the profound cultural soil of the Chinese nation. After thousands of years of development, it has formed a complete art system that integrates the unique way of thinking, aesthetic thought, cultural accomplishment, aesthetic awareness, and philosophical concepts of the entire Chinese nation [2].

The aesthetics of Chinese painting focuses on the emotion of the subject. In the view of Chinese painters, water contains a more profound cultural connotation and aesthetic meaning. Water is related to life and breath and carries the vitality of work. Therefore, Chinese painting emphasizes the nature of water and fully uses the smoothness, blurring, and rendering techniques of water to produce watercolor blending, moisturizing, transparent, seeping, soft, chic, and hazy effects. They make Chinese painting emphasize “qi” and “rhyme” and pursue Elegant, ethereal, and far-reaching artistic conception, the Zen sense of reality and reality, and the creation of creatures and images.

There are also those who are interested in Western aesthetic standards, but relatively speaking, they place more emphasis on aesthetic judgments. This emphasis on cognition in Western art makes its art have many scientific components. Western art explores the mystery and origin of science and the world, so it is more rational and realistic in form. In a sense, art is a way of mastering the world. Such aesthetic focus makes watercolor have the same aesthetic quality as oil painting, focusing on form and reproducing the understanding of the objective world. Therefore, in the eyes of western watercolor painters, water does not have the nature emphasized by Chinese painters but only acts as a blender.

Furthermore, the difference between the two is reflected in the work’s composition. In traditional Chinese painting, because the composition is not limited by time and space, things in different places and seasons can appear simultaneously on the screen, forming a “scattered perspective” opposite to the “focus perspective” in the West. It makes the composition of traditional Chinese painting more flexible and changeable, thus breaking through the limitations of time and space to express emotions. The composition forms of Chinese paintings are rich and colorful, including horizontal and vertical squares and circles, as well as lengths and sizes. The ones often seen are banners, sketches, fans, fighting squares, and screens. In Western painting, the scientific method and rigorous thinking give the composition a perfect golden ratio. Compared with traditional Chinese painting, watercolor mainly uses horizontal or square composition, and its form is relatively simple [3].

3 The Introduction of Watercolor and the Reasons for Its Reference to Chinese Painting

It has already been one hundred years since Western watercolor painting began to spread widely in Shanghai at the end of the 19th century. Li Jianchen, a master of watercolor painting, wrote in the preface of “History of Chinese Watercolor Painting” by Yuan Zhenzao, “Since the Ming and Qing Dynasties, Western learning has spread eastward, and Western watercolor painting has been introduced to China. Breed a new watercolor painting with Chinese national spirit, national temperament, and Chinese artistic taste—Chinese watercolor painting” [4]. When watercolor painting was introduced, Chinese society was in a particular development period. The national crisis was prominent, and the country encountered difficulties in development. Many patriots began to look for a way out of the country. They believed that if they were backward, they would be beaten. If they wanted to change this situation, they had to learn from the West about their advanced political system, technology, and culture. Political and cultural development

impact has made most artists feel that traditional Chinese painting is in crisis and needs to be reformed. During this period, batches of Chinese art pioneers went to Europe and the United States to study Western painting, which laid the initial foundation for developing Chinese watercolor. Since then, the entire school of painting has presented a morphological characteristic of combining Chinese and Western styles and blending Chinese and Western styles. Yuan Zhenzao pointed out in "History of Chinese Watercolor Painting" that "the development history of watercolor painting in China is also the history of the development of foreign cultures into new local cultures. The excellent culture accumulated in China for thousands of years has great inclusiveness and assimilation. To make the foreign art gradually evolve into the native art loved by the Chinese people." It can be seen that the pursuit of the national characteristics of watercolor painting is an objective fact of the development of Chinese watercolor painting.

Judging from various factors, the integration of Chinese watercolor painting and traditional Chinese painting elements is an inevitable result. From the recipient's point of view, learning from Chinese art can make the expression of language, aesthetic taste, and spiritual connotation of watercolor paintings closer to Chinese people [5]. From the creators' perspective, artists will inevitably be influenced by the times and nations and carry out conscious pursuits. Many artists have a deep understanding of real life in China and also have a profound cultivation of traditional culture. When Chinese watercolor painters depict the Chinese people and their real lives in China, they will naturally consider elements of traditional Chinese painting art so that this foreign painting language has the characteristics of the depicted objects and their cultural background. The emergence of this characteristic means the creation of Chinese watercolor painters, and it will also promote the perfection of the painter's style [6].

4 The Development of Chinese Watercolor

During the early days of watercolor development, Chinese watercolor painters merely borrowed from traditional painting on the surface, such as the combination of materials, the use of brushes, and the use of water [7]. This situation continued until the 1980s. Although the expression language and skills of watercolor works in this period have been enriched to a certain extent, there are still the following problems. One is that the expressive power is still weak, the pictures lack appeal, the language and techniques are neither fish nor fowl, neither Chinese nor Western, and the advantages of both parties are lost. Subsequently, although the language and techniques of Chinese painting are used, there is the lack of resonance, national spiritual connotation, and aesthetic taste. The spiritual capacity of painting is not reflected and recognized. Thirdly, the work's subject matter is small, and the content is limited. The entire watercolor painting gives people the feeling of a miniature painting outside the national oil engraving and has a low social status. It has little influence in the art world, domestic and global influence [8].

However, after decades of development, mature watercolor painters, based on a relatively in-depth grasp of the primary observation methods and expressive language of Western painting, in-depth reference to the essential categories and propositions of the artistic spirit of Chinese painting, such as "Clumsy," "Artistic Conception," "Realm,"

"Easy Style," "Vivid Charm," "Obsessed from the Image" and so on [9]. Taking Chinese aesthetic concepts as the starting point, they grasp the philosophical connotation of art and use it to draw lessons from expressive language skills so that Chinese watercolor painting not only has the advantages of Western painting but also has the national aesthetic taste and spiritual connotation. As a result, the painter perfected his style, enhanced the expressiveness of his works, increased his spiritual capacity, transformed small paintings into large ones, showed an oversized style, improved his status, and had a worldwide influence. In this way, Chinese watercolor took shape.

5 Specific Application of Traditional Elements in Chinese Watercolor Painting

5.1 Material

Watercolor painters use different materials in their creations, inevitably producing different artistic effects on their techniques, colors, and forms of work. Therefore, based on traditional watercolor painting, this paper discusses the limitations of watercolor materials and the use of traditional Chinese painting in creating a watercolor painting. The application has practical significance. In Li Tiesheng's work "Sichuan Emei," the author perfectly combines Chinese brushes, rice paper, and watercolor painting and creates Western paintings in the form of ink painting, boldly using the dot dyeing method in ink painting and superimposed layer upon layer. The work is ingeniously conceived, vividly showing the mighty, tall, and magnificent Mount Emei on a small piece of paper. Li Tiefu has changed the predecessors' view that watercolor painting cannot express grand scenes. Of course, this is also due to the author's profound knowledge of traditional Chinese painting.

5.2 Technique

The essential thing in the picture should be the various expressive painting techniques, such as brushes and colors, brushwork, and ink techniques. It is the combination of the two, the method of painting and the means of modeling. In Huang Tieshan's "Spring," the painter made full use of the brush length, thickness, shade, and virtual reality, in landscape painting based on his true feelings for nature, especially in the treatment of trees, based on the background color [10]. Outline the characteristics of the tree, and reflect the growth of the tree through different pens. The main reason lies in the use of unique brushwork. This unique brushwork integrates modeling and artistic conception into one expressive technique, which increases the sense of continuity of the picture and highlights the artistic personality of the language of ink painting. Huang emphasized the solid foundation of Western painting techniques with modeling as the core. At the same time, he inherited and carried forward the fine tradition of Chinese color ink. In order to absorb the essence of traditional Chinese painting, Mr. Huang Tieshan advocated going beyond the Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties to follow the Tang and Song Dynasties. In the long-term conscious comparison and reference in the creation of the watercolor painting, he is inexplicably pursuing it in his continuous efforts. Pursue the truth from practice and gradually form his unique, vigorous, clear, and sincere artistic style.

5.3 Color

In addition to improving watercolor painting in terms of materials and techniques, watercolor painters express watercolor painting with brush and force techniques and pay special attention to color in ink painting. The watercolor is vivid and forms its unique artistic characteristics. For example, in Wang Zhaomin's "Lotus and Magnolia in Backlight," the author uses a solid black-and-white contrast, using the white of the painting and the black of the vase to plant a unique and elegant artistic effect. Wang Zhaomin believes: "The more color scales, the weaker, and the less the color scales, the more powerful. If there are more, the contrast will be weak, and if weak, the power will be weak; if there are few, the contrast will be strong, and if strong, it will be powerful." Therefore, in his works, high saturation and the state of high purity appears, which may be derived from the simple understanding of ink color in ink painting. Watercolor painter Liu Shouxiang wrote in "Fresh Fruit Creation Ideas" that "I have used black more in painting still life in recent years. Ink plays a major role in traditional Chinese paintings. Chinese people can accept black and white in their appreciation habits. Of course, the application of blackness in watercolor painting requires a conversion process because watercolor painting belongs to the category of Western painting." He also blends Eastern culture with Western tradition and things of the times very well and is mature without any trace of rote collage between them.

6 Conclusion

As a traditional painting method in the West, watercolor painting has the realistic function of depicting images while having the same effect as Chinese ink painting in terms of aesthetic taste and brushwork. Despite that watercolor has only been introduced in China for decades, applying Chinese painting elements in the medium has already resulted in a considerable achievement. Watercolor painters have integrated Chinese traditional culture into the creation of watercolor paintings and embarked on an artistic road with Chinese characteristics. Chinese watercolor works contain profound national spirit connotations, making the works' expressive language, aesthetic taste, and spiritual connotation closer to the Chinese people. Because it conforms to national psychology and easily resonates with Chinese people, the art of watercolor painting is more appealing, and the spiritual capacity of the painting to its audience is reflected and recognized. Through years of development, Chinese watercolor painters began to realize that the core of creation should be based on the spiritual connotation of Chinese art. This removes the self-limitation caused by superficial transfer at the level of language techniques and solves the problem of enhancing the expressiveness of Chinese watercolor. At the same time, the research on the fundamental observation methods and expressive language techniques of western painting has enriched and expanded the language system and expressive field of watercolor painting. The breakthrough of the concept and the recognition of the exploration of new techniques have caused a significant change in the value judgment of the watercolor painting circle. The evaluation standard of watercolor has been broadened. Due to the increase in the spiritual capacity of the picture, the change in function has dramatically promoted the transformation of Chinese watercolor from being mainly used as a means of sketching practice and collecting materials to an independent

easel painting art loved by the public. The social influence of watercolor painting at the global scale has increased. Under globalization and the eastward expansion of solid western culture, the formation of national characteristics prevents Chinese watercolor art from losing itself and becoming a vassal of Western culture. The formation of Chinese watercolor painting will enable the national spirit to be inherited in the new era and media.

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