

Listen to the Voice of Flower

On the Art of Figures in the Ink and Wash Painted by Huang Dan

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Abstract—As an emerging female painter very popular nowadays, Huang Dan has created many ink and wash paintings that can definitely stand up to close examination and evaluation, which, to some extent, is because the figures in her painting are all gentle and elegant women. Besides, ink and wash represents the essence of traditional Chinese culture. And it's fairly uneasy for one living in such an impetuous world full of vanity to express her pure and gentle feelings and thoughts with such form of art. Her paintings also embody the traditional Chinese culture of "fancy quietness". In the painter's words, she simply wants to make contribution to the development of ink and wash. Such kind of persistence and efforts are respectable and we should draw on the successful experience of her.

Keywords—*Ink and wash; Huang Dan; figure*

I. INTRODUCTION

Huang Dan is quite wise and sensible. In her paintings, there is no evidence of confusion, flippancy and bewilderment which are typical in the modern era. Or we can say, maybe she doesn't want to pass her negative sentiments on to others. Therefore, all the things reflected in her work are her slight grief and silent thought, from which we can see her reflection on modernized human nature. In terms of the learning experience, Huang Dan graduated from the most authoritative university in the art world, namely, China Central Academy of Fine Arts. Nevertheless, she hasn't been limited by the traditional ink and wash in its ways and skills of expression as well as in its style. On the contrary, she has made bold innovations in such aspects and the result was inspiring.

II. ANALYSIS ON THE CULTURAL CONTEXT IN HUANG DAN'S INK AND WASH

There can be little doubt that each artistic form is rooted in a particular social and cultural background, Huang Dan's work is no exception. Ink and wash, as a formulated linguistic form which has gone through generations of accumulation and inheritance, has developed a set of particular ways of expression. It proved a natural arena for ink and wash to present things like water, mountains, figures, flowers and birds. That's because Chinese ink itself was an indispensable part for the ancient people, which certainly acted as the carrier for them to express their feeling and emotions. In terms of the technique of expression, although

the formulated things lift the work technically, it is liable to become a rigid symbol which may hinder the course of artistic innovation in the long run. It is reflected typically that the ink and wash is facing a dilemma. We may even say that the urbanization has driven the traditional ink and wash to a state of "aphasia", especially in the field of ink figure. In the modern society, females won't get on a bus for the workplace wearing silks and brocades like an ancient woman. That's because such dressing style does not accord with the modern concept of "seeking convenience and efficiency". Therefore, the skill created by the ancient ones, which is used in drawing clothes with much smocking, may appear weird if applied in drawing modern clothes. Then, how can we make the old ink and wash integrate itself into the modern society? How do we carry the culture feelings and aesthetic standards of contemporary people? Ink and wash painters have sought for solutions to such questions all along in the modern society.

The rigorously formulated patterns of ink and wash may seem extremely unnatural and affected for the depressive and blundering urban people. Moreover, urbanization is also driving the simple country life farther and farther from us. When the traditional artistic form confronts with the modern topic, it's like casting pearls to a wine, they two does not fit with each other. Huang Dan has realized this early when she was in the university. Therefore, after taking a series of lessons which combined copy of excellent works of masters, sketch from life and creative painting together, she has never made her paintings mere formalities. Contrarily, she has firmly thrown away the traditional forms of ink and wash. The surrounding world, girls around her in daily life have all supplied her with objects in her paintings. With the impressive ink painting, she speaks for the girls of the slight touch of melancholy at the bottom of their hearts.

III. ANALYSIS ON THE IMAGES OF FIGURES IN HUANG DAN'S INK AND WASH

Painters using Chinese ink to present the complicated nature of women are not in minority. Owing to the painters' growing consciousness in human being's living condition, we can easily find the female images featuring women's bewilderment, exhaust and indifference in the works of artists like Liu Qinghe, Tian Liming and Zhang wang. As an emerging female painter born in 1970s, Huang started using Chinese ink to depict the image of women in 2003. At that

time, she was not very experienced and skillful in techniques, which can be seen in two of her works: *XiaoXiao* and *Let me look at you again*. Her way of drawing the light ink, although slightly immature, vividly depicted a peaceful atmosphere and the pure inner mind of the girls on the paintings. The figure's hands, faces and wrists were sketched with thin and disconnected ink lines in order to show the girls' youngness and naïve, which perfectly interpreted Jia Baoyu's (hero in *A Dream in Red Mansions*) saying: "Girls are made of water."

We can see from a series of Huang's works in 2005 that the female images under her brush became apparently stable and mature. She has achieved a relatively suitable state where she can use the brush and ink with facility. In her paintings, the lines and color no longer appeared rough and maladroit. Rather, in her ink and washes *Bie Wei Qu*, *Yao Yao*, and *Plantain*, there isn't any evidence of uncertainty. Upon seeing these works, the beauty of formal unity as well as the pure feeling presented in them overwhelmed me. The details in the figure's eyes are vivid and expressive in particular. Gu Kaizhi, a famous painter in the Eastern Jin Dynasty, once put forward the standard for figure portraying: "Vivid portrayal lies in 'A Du' (the key parts)." In other words, when portraying figures, exhibiting their eyes is quite essential. That's because human beings' smiles and tears are all expressed through such part of their face. Therefore, whether the female in the painting is raising her head eagerly for somebody or she is lowering her head in deep thought; her emotions will all be reflected in her eyes. Huang successfully used the thick and heavy ink to add to the figures' loneliness with no exception. It can even be said that such technique has already been typical of her painting style, a feature expressing the painter's inner world.

The way westerners sketch the figure and Huang's portrayal run in opposite directions. Unlike realistic methods of western paintings which focus on the form, structure, and the effect of light and quality, portrayal of the woman in Huang's ink and wash lays stress on the artistic conception it reflects. Imagine a poetic woman slowly heave in your sight, seated or standing, simple and pure without any unnecessary decoration. Such an image is then presented on the Chinese art paper or bark paper. In her painting *Red Hair Band* of 2006, Huang portrayed a girl wearing a warm-toned turtleneck. Rather, she only drew the whole head and part of the girl's upper body. Even some parts on the face were left not portrayed. We can see the girl pursed her thin lips slightly. Her nose was deleted. However, the whole facial expression was not affected at all. Such way of figure portrayal accords with people's aesthetic standards in the modern world. With imageries in ink and wash, paintings like Huang's can bring moments of relax and peace in the tide of super-busy city lives.

IV. ANALYSIS ON THE LANGUAGE OF PAINTING IN HUANG DAN'S INK AND WASH

When seeing Huang's paintings, the primary impression they left on us is simple and aesthetic. The traditional Chinese ink and wash has all along advocated the aesthetic spirit of being simple and overall image-oriented. The trivial details, as a result, were always deliberately ignored by the

painters. For instance, the *Drunken Celestial* painted by Liang kai in the Song Dynasty (AD960-AD1279) features the rough lines. He successfully evoked an image of a charmingly naïve Celestial with minimal use of details, thus created one of the classics in ink and wash painting. Similarly, women in Huang Dan's paintings are also simple and charming with little decoration. *Yao Yao* drawn in 2005 by her is another example. It simply consisted of some ink blocks. Each block was painted with light ink with dotted fine gaps in it, thus making the whole picture seem hazy like the sunshine pouring down through the tree branches. Moreover, the eyebrows and eyes of the figure were also outlined with light ink, which brought out her skein of sorrow in an implied way.

The traditional "Gongbi" (a way of drawing) emphasizes the art of line-drawing and requires that no color should conceal the ink outlines, which illustrated the significance of lines in drawings. However, influenced by her teachers at China Central Academy of Fine Arts who favor the idea of "inheritance and innovation", Huang Dan attached equal importance to the lines and color in her paintings. According to her, both color and line are indispensable in the picture. They can express the spirit of the painting. Besides, each line in her brush pen, whether curve or straight, long or rough, is vivid and energetic. The lines sketching human body vary accordingly. For example, in drawing parts such as wrist and elbow, lines have different shades with flowerlike ink dots scattered around them. In such method, she managed to create a fairy atmosphere. In her work *Plantain* drew in 2006, the figure's was painted with rows of graceful and fluent lines. Some looked like plum leaf crabs, some like heronsbill, still some looked like the thin and long leaves of *Plantain*. Around the lines, Huang used some dark ink blocks as decoration in order to create an overwhelming ink landscape. Under the skirt of the long dress, she used the closely arrayed lines with brighter color. Yet if we look from afar, it still looked like a block of ink. She also added a thin silk ribbon on the waist of the girl, which stretched itself down to the lower right corner. Hence the girl's beauty and melancholy stand vividly revealed on the paper. It contains the true nature of women.

In terms of the layout design, Huang Dan adopts mainly the vertical patterns which are typical of traditional ink and wash painting. This way of composition can make the figure easier to be placed stably in the picture. Sometimes, there is only a woman in the center of the picture with blocks of blankness; Sometimes, there are two women facing each other with their eyebrows slightly knitted as if deep in thought; Sometimes, we can see the face of one or several female with two eye-catching seals in the corner. In a word, beyond the simple sketch, there is some implied beauty in Huang's paintings, which should be attributed to her inborn-talent in a family of art. As the daughter of Huang Gesheng, who is vice-chairman of Chinese Art Association, Huang Dan has definitely favorable conditions to access the traditional Chinese paintings. Influenced constantly by her father's ink and wash works, Huang Dan has learnt much. Let alone the fact that Huang Gesheng is very famous for his grand and magnificent landscape paintings. Fortunately, she

hasn't been bounded by her father's painting objects and formula but found an unconventional way of ink painting. She steered the angle of view to girls around her and created a series of innovative ink and washes focusing on women and girls. I think the old saying of "pupil excels the master" is probably the case.

In terms of ink painting techniques, painters lay their emphasis on the accidental effect brought by ink smudging, thus reducing the traditional technique of "keeping the brush vertical when drawing." Through drawing some simple ink blocks and times of smudging, the whole image may be exhibited tactfully in the painting. Like people's emotions, the levels of ink shade are hard to be controlled. But this is not a hinder for the painter to deal with the ink shades. In her *Missing You II* in 2006, the light ink used to draw the female's complexion contrasted distinctively with the hairlines drawn by the thin brush tip, which produced a thought-provoking visual effect.

V. ANALYSIS ON THE INNOVATIVENESS IN HUANG DAN'S INK AND WASH

When exploring the future of ink and wash in the contemporary society, many masters in the art world has pointed the way, that is, inheritance and innovation. This way is what many masters like Liu Qinghe and Tian Liming have all along advocated. As esthetician Zong Baihua puts: "If we stick too much to the traditions, the development of art will painfully stick in the mud." Meanwhile, with the market of oil paintings rapidly emerging recently, the art of ink was gradually marginalized. Traditional ink and wash struggled to develop while still remain in plight. In a world filled with fast food culture and money worship, many ink painters have to give up painting ink and wash temporarily for lack of money. Rather, they draw some vulgar oil paintings to cater to the foreigners. Such profit-seeking behavior is a shame for the art world. Living in a society like this, Huang Dan has stood firm in the ink world all the time. Meanwhile, she was bold to make innovations. She expressed her great concern and sympathy on women in the modern society. Therefore, figures in her ink and wash are more vivid than those in the oil paintings. Her attitude toward ink painting, to some extent, is an innovation itself.

Huang Dan pays great attention to texture expression and loves applying selectively the newly-emerged forms of art in her painting so as to create a special visual effect. As a result of that, she has made a lot of breakthroughs. It can be said that anything that is beneficial to ink painting deserves trying in Huang's mind. When painting dresses and decorations on the clothes, she distinguishes her paintings from the traditional ones. Some are outlined with thin brushes and light ink after spreading a layer of titanium whites on the art paper. Some are slightly decorated after the primary outlining. We can see evidence of modern art of decoration from her paintings. Sometimes, to produce the effect of embroidery, Huang Dan may firstly use dark ink to outline the plants and flowers. After that, she will suck up the ink block with a clean brush so as to create the effect of paste-ups, making us feel the trace of art.

Using gold foil is one of the distinctive features in Huang's painting. The gold foil enriches the expressiveness of ink and wash, making her paintings more special. For instance, in her work *Love Beans* which was drawn in 2006, two beautiful women walked hand in hand as if absorbed in thought. The left one wore a dress sketched with dark ink while the right one wore a strapless long dress with white line forming patterns of plants. The white and bright ones then contrasted sharply with the black and dim ones. Yet such contrast may appear a bit stark and weird in terms of the overall image. Therefore, Huang Dan used quite a lot of gold foils as the background to soften such contrast. As a result, the gold foils formed a picture of lush trees, causing a charming and gentle landscape. Moreover, the gold foils, as a background, give the two figures more depth and elegance.

VI. CONCLUSION

In general, Huang Dan uses continuously innovative language forms to present a light world of ink. The simple elements in her paintings reflect the inner peace and beauty of the figures. Her work accords well with the contemporary aesthetic standards. Besides, the figures' tranquil quality reflected in the Huang's paintings is of a piece with the deep feature of traditional ink and wash. Inheritance serves for better innovation. We can tell from Huang Dan's bold innovation in this field that ink and wash has boundless prospects in the contemporary world and that it will finally establish itself in the world arena of art with its new idiosyncrasy and connotation.

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