

Short Life as if a Dream and Dream as if a Floating Life

Discussion on Space Formation in Ceramic Painting with “Dreamland” Theme in the Period of Ming and Qing Dynasty

Yuanqian Lai

Jingdezhen Ceramic Institute
Jingdezhen, China

Chunhui Li

Shanghai Polytechnic University
Shanghai, China

Abstract—The paper takes ceramic painting with “dreamland” theme in the period of Ming and Qing Dynasty as its research objects. Based on the “cloud” shaped boundary of spanning space, it divides visual space of painting into two parts: “realm of reality” space and “dreamland” space. The paper tries combining with the “dreamland” shown in traditional Chinese opera to reveal the advantage of ceramic painting in showing the theme, its unique space formation method and realistic society reflected.

Keywords—“Dreamland” theme; ceramic painting; space formation

I. INTRODUCTION

In the period of Ming and Qing Dynasty, with technological progress of the printing press and springing up of commercial culture, China’s classical fiction enters a climax of development. At that time, many scholars participate in creation of narrative literature such as fiction, traditional Chinese opera and so on. With the help of many dream relevant pictures, subject consciousness is shown in various artistic expression media. In the period of Ming and Qing Dynasty, dream themed literature develops as a whole and image on dreams becomes increasingly mature as shown in ceramic painting widely. Besides continuing the tradition of describing things beyond common sense, ceramic painting creation with “dreamland” theme in the period of Ming and Qing Dynasty pays special attention to the connection between dream and reality, which is exactly the same as creation of dream relevant text in the same period. Ceramic painting with “dreamland” theme is generally regarded as a contrast to social life, revealing the realistic life’s reality and cruelty, and ideal and vision.

Main text:

Ceramic painting with “dreamland” theme is an independent form of artistic presentation formed by imitating text illustration based on traditional drama story text and in combination with its own material particularity. Internal connection exists in logical structures of visual images on porcelain with “dreamland” theme and the original text. Although they have certain textual dependency, each of them owns a complete image viewing form with strong

independence and their dream relevant theme, plot paradigm and combination of two spaces are greatly modeled. Differentiating from the original text, intensifying and transformation of partial painting reflect people’s aesthetic consciousness and cultural concept at that time to some degree.

Material carrier of ceramic painting is also material. However, materiality only occupies the two dimensional plane. As important roles in building painting space, line and color are the major means to represent the aesthetic space of imagery. In the creation process of ceramic painting with “dreamland” theme, while adapting to implements’ modeling, composition of a picture contributes to the forming of “dreamland” space according to line density, tonal shade and depth, and color richness based on its own material characteristics.

II. “CLOUD” SHAPED BOUNDARY: DIVIDING SPACE

Dreamland or fantasy space manifestation originates from Buddhism images and it usually coils up in a “cloud” shaped layout above figures’ fontanel (the gate that the soul comes in and goes out). In addition, the dream starts from the closed window seam. The man dreaming is not shown on purpose. However, the contour line of dreamland in transformative mode must be shown. Simply speaking, the “frame” formed by “clouds” is “dreamland”. As to ceramic painting with “dreamland” theme, it is the commonest to show dreamland by creating “cloud” boundary at the top of the head of a man in sleep, manifesting a man’s real experience of wandering in the world beyond reality in somnia.

Cloud gives people an illusory and unreal feeling due to its illusory nature and many forms and has cultural connotation as a certain symbol. Although the “cloud” schema is formed only by pure curves, its visual space falls into two totally different situations. The “cloud” becomes an established visual cognition of creators and audiences and people naturally set the painting as two co-existed space based on the simple “boundary”. Although the two space are different in representation form, theme and technique, the structure of painting will vary as long as the boundary exists, representing things in the two space. Upon receiving the “cloud” boundary, the audience firmly believes that outside the boundary lies the real world while inside the boundary lies the unreal world.

“Cloud” boundary makes fantasy space integrated into the real space ingeniously with two stories unfolded in the same painting at the same time. Apart from the basic function of dividing space in the whole painting, “cloud” boundary plays a greater role in extension and building of space.

It’s worth noting that although “cloud” diagram varies a lot, its form needs to be harmonious with the whole painting, adapt to the form of ceramic implements and consider its own space depiction rather than being random.

III. “REALM OF REALITY” SPACE

In his work -- *Art and Visual Perception*, Rudolph Arnheim believes, “Closed plane is easily regarded as “picture” while another plane sealing this plane is always regarded as base. In addition, under certain conditions, the smaller plane is likely to be seen as “picture” while the larger one is seen as base.” In ceramic painting, as the basis to realize “dreamland”, “realm of reality” is usually a sensible image, namely the directly depicted artistic image. “Realm of reality” space can also be interpreted as an artistic circumstance created by artists according to objective laws. It forms the “base” outside the enclosure space formed by “cloud” boundary and further intensifies the effect of “base” in a painting.

In manifestation of “realm of reality” in ceramic painting, usually there is only one major figure, with a schoolboy in a corner sometimes. Most major figures are male with a small part as female. People usually lie down on a table rather than a bed. It is the same case with painting whose original play script says going to bed to sleep at night, probably due to the fact that it is based on and refers to the special performing form of ancient dreamland designed for watching beauty. In addition, people generally are accompanied by articles indicating the identity (like books) and there are always hill stones and jungle to present the deep and serene, and wide and boundless environment and there are also elements indicating night in the sky, like the clear and bright moon and stars. The overall tone of space doesn’t seem to be heavy or dim compared with other painting. It endows the audience with the ability to see through the dark night clearly and its tonal performance is slightly different from other parts rather than the “base”.

IV. “DREAMLAND” SPACE

Dream is reflection and compensation of reality and “dreamland” is the correspondence of “realm of reality”. “Dream images” are mostly about various things related to “realm of reality” and their visual signs mostly originate from real life. “Dreamland” images are different from reproduction of tangible material carriers, like painted scroll, mirror and screen. Instead, they are intangible carriers formed by people’s psychological activity, similar to imagination, reminiscence and so on. Although the tale characteristic progressive narration of sleepwalk, like *Figure of Goddess* completely describing dreamland, exists in ancient Chinese painting, ceramic images with dreamland theme are generally transplanted and transformed from sleeping pictures as illustration in traditional Chinese opera. Since the audience is generally common people, the expression is relatively simple. In literature, there are four patterns of manifestation of

categorized “dreamland”: “ghost seeking revenge image”, “blooming flowers and full moon -- love dream image”, “complicated legal case dream image” and “transgression dream image with vanishing feelings”. The representation content of porcelain is relatively simple, and the commonest one is “love dream image”.

Spatial constitutional elements are quite simple in ceramic painting with “dreamland” theme. Compared with “realm of reality” space, “dreamland” space usually has more people, specifically three or so. Interaction between people boosts happening of events. Apart from major figures, other objects presenting the scene hardly appear. Large blank area is to convey the hallucinogenic atmosphere in dreamland rather than highlighting the main body. It alleviates audience’s visual tension, shows differences between “realm of reality” space and “dreamland” space, endows the painting with varying space and expands the space at the same time.

In addition, some corresponding characters and images in “dreamland” space have a special function of intertextuality. Lines or characters with different connotations in the painting can balance the painting and the intertextuality of characters and images as two different media further defines manifestation content of the painting. However, since paintings of this pattern usually are very similar to each other and can be matched with different narrative texts. When watching, the less educated audience may get confused among several stories and can hardly distinguish one from another.

V. FALSE OR TRUE COMPLEMENT IN SPACE

Ceramic painting generally adopts the “cloud” diagram to form the boundary, establishing the separated and interdependency spatial relation of “realm of reality” space and “dreamland” space. The audience forms the habit to recognize the boundary in the long-term viewing pattern. Similar to the sleep god introducing the dreamland in traditional Chinese opera, cloud introduces the subsequent story. Different from *Mind Travel Painting* and *Dreamland Painting* in the traditional painting which directly depict visual performance modes of painting in conception or imagination, in ceramic painting with “dreamland” theme, the “realm of reality” space pays special attention to its contrast with “dreamland” space and their comparison and reference constitute the “dreamland” space. In this kind of painting, “realm of reality” space and “dreamland” space generally co-exist to represent the story line or fragment of different time periods. These two kinds of space are different in proportion, but similar in existence value and degree of importance.

Figures in “realm of reality” space and “dreamland” space usually overlap, seeming to prove the closeness of them in an appropriate way. The scene in “dreamland” space can both be past and future with many fantasy and virtual elements, wide and free in time while “realm of reality” space only exists in the current state of time. In real life, due to limitations of real and rational factors, the “feeling” is limited and weakened. However, “feeling” is unimpeded and almighty in dream. The whole spatial creation makes the overlapping of two kinds of environment, figure and event possible and the unreasonable situation reasonable. Dreamland time breaks through the

limitation of real time. And its space breaks through the possibilities of real space. What's more important, narration of dreamland space becomes the key to integration of plot and construction of the whole chapter.

Martin Heidegger doesn't think that "present" things are more real and beautiful than "absent" things. It is true that real and virtual complement makes an impressive scene. In ceramic painting with "dreamland" theme, the two kinds of space co-exist, naturally reducing people's original association and imagination of "dreamland" space in textual story. The anfractuosity, weirdness and fantasy of dream are shown in a more straightforward way. Emotion in dream is no less than that in reality. Life is as ethereal as a dream and the dream is as real as resurgence. The existence of dreamland is the only real dispersion of reality, proving the realness of dreamland. Apposition of these two kinds of space makes the feeling of reality and spirituality of inconsistent and connected stories conveyed in a wonderful way.

VI. CONCLUSION:

In the period of Ming and Qing Dynasty, dreamy images in ceramic painting depict dreams and fantasy without separation from "realness" which lies in "truth". The "truth" here refers to value orientation with universal meaning in current society. As an original personal and private thing, dream is transferred to ceramic painting and leeches on to implements with nature of goods, circulating and becoming a public object for watching. Due to its own nature, morphological features, creation group and use object, at the same time of transforming texts of traditional Chinese opera and referring to other artistic forms, dreamland manifestation in ceramic painting creates the false or true complement relation between "realm of reality" space and "dreamland" space, making it easy for the common people to understand its hidden meaning. The purer manifestation content compared with other painting forms and the richer and more baffling colors compared with print illustration make people glad to appreciate and buy. Dreamy images in ceramic painting contain creators' subjective feelings and reflect the audience's visual demand, aiming to show their own artistic taste in the process of spreading "truth".

REFERENCES

- [1] Rudolph • Arnheim. *Art and Visual Conception*[M]. Translated by Teng Shouyao, Zhu Jiangyuan. Chengdu: Sichuan People's Publishing House, 1998.
- [2] Craig Clunas(English). *Images and Visuality of Ming Dynasty*[M]. Beijing: Peking University Press, 2011.
- [3] Chen Runmin. *Qing Porcelain Collection in Palace Museum. Blue and White Porcelain of Qing Shunzhi and Kangxi Dynasty*[M]. Beijing: Forbidden City Publishing House, 2004.
- [4] Ni Yibin. *Porcelain Illustration*[M]. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2008.
- [5] Jin Xiuxuan. *Research on Illustration in Fictions of the Ming and Qing Dynasties*[D]. Beijing: Peking University, 2013.