

Look Into the Logicality of Changes of Chinese Ink From Evolution of the Function of Chinese Painting

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Abstract

Upon the birth of painting, it was not a kind of independent art. Along with the historical development, the painting evolves from dependency to self-consciousness and independency, and such independent sources on the evolution of the function of painting, namely, developing from the cognitive function and supplementary function to the function of spiritual manifestation. If viewed from the angle of function, the function of painting has gone through the following process: Record appearance-vivid expression-artistic conception-freehand brushwork. As a whole, it is a transitional process from the depiction of object to expression of subject's feelings and disposition. While for the development of ink and stroke, it also has gone through a process: apply the stroke (ink) according to the actual state of the object, and gradually develop to apply the stroke (ink) in accordance with the need of feelings of the creator, i.e. narrate objects-imitate image-describe inner world of men-freehand brushwork. The changes of Chinese ink involve many elements, one of which is in analyze changes of Chinese ink from evolution of the function of Chinese painting.

Key words: Function, Narrate objects; Artistic conception; Describe inner world of men; Freehand brushwork

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INTRODUCTION

Upon the birth of painting, it was not a kind of independent art. Along with the historical development, the painting evolves from dependency to self-consciousness and independency, and such independence sources from the evolution of the function of painting, namely, developing from the cognitive function and supplementary function to the function of spiritual manifestation. If viewed from the angle of function, the function of painting has gone through the following process: record appearance-vivid expression- artistic conception-freehand brushwork. As a whole, it is a transitional process from the depiction of object to expression of subject's feelings and disposition. While for the development of ink and stroke, it also has gone through a process: Apply the stroke (ink) according to the actual state of the object, and gradually develop to apply the stroke (ink) in accordance with the need of feelings of the creator, i.e. narrate objects-imitate image-describe inner world of men-freehand brushwork. Change of Chinese ink was also a gradual process. The painting of mountains and rivers started in Tang dynasty, while the development of painting of figure got perfect in Northern Song dynasty, and painting of flowers and birds witnessed the accomplishment of the change from focusing on color to emphasizing the ink till Yuan dynasty, therefore, the change of Chinese ink that we talked about here was mainly for ideas, it was not necessarily to find a direct correspondence in paintings. We can elaborate on the subject in the following four aspects.

1. SUBSIDIARITY OF DRAWING

At the stage of birth of painting, it was not independent, but of strong dependency. With the same purpose as many other practices in the art field today, the emergence of painting was not for appreciation of beauty and pleasure,

but closely related to the conceptions in witchcraft, primitive belief, etc., with an obvious tendency to material gain. Nowadays, we took those cliff painting, pavement drawing, pattern of ancient painted pottery and engraving symbols as the origin of painting, by survey we found that all of them were of definite functions at the period of creation, such conditions lasted to the “axial age” of human being, i.e. the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period when China Philosophy made great breakthrough. It was recorded in *Tso Chuan-The 3rd Year of Duke Xuan (673 B.C.)*:

The importance of tripod relied on morals but not its size or weight. The prior Xia Dynasty witnessed nice morals in society, people drew pictures to record things afar, governors from nine states paid tribute with copper wares, they cast nine tripods, and cast such drawings on the tripods, so people could see all things from the tripods, including supernatural beings and monsters. When people entered mountains, rivers or forests, they would not encounter bad things. Monsters would never be found, all people could enjoy harmonious life and receive good luck endowed by God.¹

Such paintings cast on the tripods was wonder things in the legends, on the one hand, the purpose of such painting was for the function of sacrifice to ancestors with nature of witchcraft; on the other hand, these paintings could supply knowledge to people and discriminate the bad from the good. The ruler shouldered the God’s will by such symbolic activities of casting tripods and achieved the orthodox position to govern the dynasty, therefore, these paintings were given the function of political morals. There was a conversation between Zixia and Confucius on the theme that “during painting, painters often filled the full color first and then drew the outlines with plain lines”, the key sentence of such conversation was the last one: “it was Zixia who inspired me, people with similar quality as him could exchange ideas with me on *The Book of Songs!*” Confucius explained painting together with *The Book of Songs*, no matter how to describe the relationship of “painting” and “plain lines”, it could be viewed that Confucius still put the focus on morals—benevolence and etiquette, here painting was just taken as a carrier of metaphor. In *Zhuangzi* ▪ *Tian Zifang* referred to the “true painter”, whose status of “taking off coat and stripped to the waist” became the synonym of painting creation in later generations; with the same view angle of Confucius, the conversation between Zhuangzi and Tian Zifang was not just talking about painting, but discussing a philosophy—as a “true painter”, he should work with an attitude of tranquility and objective. Such discipline was same as the meaning of “perfect skills are close to the law” that was described in “dismembering

an ox as skillfully as a butcher”, which was both to solve the problems of life philosophy or social situation. Besides, in *Confucius Sayings Collected from His Family* also referred to “*Confucius visited the Hall*” and *The Analects of Confucius-Liren* discussed “aim to find law, base on morals, depend on benevolence and learn various skills”, both of which put drawing and “skill” at the dependent position and emphasize on their function to serve the political morals. Though their discussion were not for drawing, general works on history of painting theory all traced back the origin to the period of Pre-Qin with diverse schools of thought contending, obtained the primitive status of Chinese painting by explanation on several words of such philosophers. And in fact they thought indeed became the theoretical resource of Chinese painting theory. As coming generations kept explaining and improving, finally the full system of appreciation of beauty for Chinese art was formed. *Zhouli-Code of Technique in All Walks of Society* also talked about the issue of colors:

It is a must to match colors during painting, green should be the symbol of the east, red as the symbol of the south, white as the symbol for the west and black as the symbol of the north, painting the sky in dark black, and draw the earth in yellow. Green and white should be painted in sequence, and red and black should be painted next to each other, dark black and yellow should be painted successively.²

Code of Technique in All Walks of Society is a document written during Warring states and beginning of Han Dynasty, and such corresponding relationship between colors and directions also had been proven in plenty of wall paintings and drawings on bricks and rocks in Han Dynasty, which were found in archaeological studies later. It can be viewed that the recognition and improvement of painting also started from the concept, but not corresponded to the colors of objective materials, which also deeply influenced the color concept of Chinese painting. In a word, in the long times prior to Wei and Jin dynasties, the position of painting was of dependency, the purpose of painting was to meet the need of people on the recognition of nature and universe, and painting played its role in keeping the rule of the world.

2. CONSCIOUSNESS OF NOUMENON OF DRAWING

The period of Wei and Jin dynasties was the times that painting formed its self-consciousness, which had begun since Han Dynasty. In *Descriptive Prose of the Lingguang Palace of King Lu* written by Wang Yanshou and *Preface for the Ode to Painting* of Cao Zhi both expressed

¹ Sorting Committee of *Notes to Thirteen Confucian Classics, Implication of Tso Chuan* (1999, pp.602-603). Beijing: Peking University Press.

² Sorting Committee of *Notes to Thirteen Confucian Classics, Notes to Zhou Li* (1999, p.1115). Beijing: Peking University Press.

affirmation on the function of painting: “by the good and evil shown in painting, it is to give a lesson for the coming generations”. On the one hand, painting was the extension of the function of political education, on the other hand, compared painting with the studies of official historians, it not only had the function of recording the talent, fool, success and failure in history, but also had the same function of warnings by painting as expressed in the words “painting for warning, poems for persuasion.” In this way, the position of painting was undoubtedly up. While Lu Ji from West Jin dynasty had to follow comments on painting:

the emergence of painting could be compared to the compiling of *Ya* and *Song* for literature, the great career of painting gave off fragrance for beauty since then. The best way to describe things was literature, while no better way of expressing the appearance could be parallel to painting. (Lu & Shi, 1998)

he put painting at the same level with *The Book of Songs*, which displayed the self-consciousness of theory on fine arts and literature. More important, he proposed the similarity between literature and painting, they gave recognition to the world by different ways (describe things and express appearance) in different fields. Such comments showed the sprout of pursuit of painting for its own features and offered the direction for the development of theory on painting. The real painting comment started from Gu Kaizhi. The core thought on painting of Gu Kaizhi was “expressive”; he gave discussions by the example of figure painting, which directly related to the trend of appraisal on figures at that time. To achieve the aim of expressive, it is necessary to pay attention to the artwork of figure type (class), and attach importance to the display of personal details (“the most expressive point laid in the eyes of the figure” and “it is better to add mustache on the face of Pei Shuze”). It was not only to emphasize the “spirit”, “nature”, i.e. the gesture, behavior and look of the figure, but also pay much attention to the exertion of perception and imagination (“apply imagination to create masterwork” and “adopt great skills after deliberate planning”). History of Chinese Aesthetics gave following comment:

though “achieving expressive effect by appearance” is a short word, it was the first time to definitely discriminate “appearance” from “spirit” in art theory, and point out that painting “appearance” was for spirit, and “appearance” was dependent to spirit. Painting ‘ppearance should not break away from spirit. Separating from spirit, painting appearance was of no value of art. (Li & Liu, 1987)

The proposal of expressive theory brought an important standard for comment and appraisal of painting. Though paintings of figure were still under the cover of the frame of education, it was undoubtedly to pave the road for the coming painting to enter the free realm and independent appraisal. Along this road, Zong Bing and Wang Wei gave further explanation. Zong Bing put forward the ideas of “expressing the ‘spirit’ of mountains

and rivers by painting” and “expressing internal vitality”. On the one hand, he expanded the perception scope of spirit to mountains, rivers, even the nature; on the other hand, he presented the pleasure of appreciation of beauty for people by painting, which leapt to the higher realm of sage who could “express subjective thoughts by nature things” on the basis of the wise man who could “appreciate the beauty of natural mountains and rivers with clear mind”. While Wang Wei showed feelings of “seeing the clouds of autumn sky, I sense the great image of the earth and the heaven; as spring breeze blows, I feel high”, which was not only the pleasure of sensory organ, but also was the existence of belief and transcendence of human being. So as to speak, their understanding on painting had gone up to the spiritual level of clear mind and natural laws from the practical layer of appearance of things and persuasion by image. The function of painting had been related to the expression of personal feelings, which extended to a wider field.

Zong Bing and Wang Wei enhanced the realm of painting, but did not find the corresponding way to such realm in reality. Their logic was: Since we could realize the same thought and pleasure as sages and the wise man from the painting work, achieved the realm of “expressing internal vitality” even “expressing internal feeling”, hence spirit, “logic” and “law” naturally existed in painting. “Spirit” of mountains and rivers” could be conveyed by the way of “painting appearance to express internal feeling”. During such process, it was still to apply the ancient Chinese way of thought and recognition-“sense”, and unite the ability of intuition and sense with visibility of painting so as to affirm the position of painting. However, to feel is one thing, to express is another thing. The experience of the appreciation of beauty obtained through imagination and meditation was greatly different from the wallop brought by painting. It was till Xie He came up with the “Six-way” theory that how to solve the problem of isomorphism between appearance and spirit was dealt with. Six-way was the standard of comment as well as the theory of creation, which provided the method for how to watch, recognize and express the objects. The core of Six-way was “vivid artistic conception”. There was common point as well as difference between “artistic conception” and spirit. The common point lied at both of them were related to the manner in Wei and Jin Dynasties, appraisal on figures; while the difference was that spirit came from the object being expressed, “vivid artistic conception” was not only referring to the object, but also talking about the painting work. Expressive could not be realized without the reflected object, while “vivid artistic conception” completely could be the quality of the painting work. The independence of painting could be found here, though the complete self-consciousness was not realized, it could be viewed that the painting work was of vitality with vivid and fresh

image. Meanwhile, “vivid artistic conception” was of wider containment and initiative compared with the expressive theory that came from the painting of figure, and could accept wider filed and more flexible style of art.

3. INDEPENDENCE OF FORM OF DRAWING

Since the birth of expressive theory proposed by Gu Kaizhi, by the development of Zong Bing, Wang Wei and Xie He, painting had obtained independent form in Wei and Jin Dynasties, such independence came from the evolution of the function of painting, i.e. from the recognition function of “recognizing the good and the evil” and the adding function to “material” by “during painting, painters often filled the full color first and then drew the outlines with plain lines”, the function of painting turned to the function of expressing spirit by “express the spirit through drawing appearance”. Before this, painting was the expression of political education based on “recording appearance”. No matter the confucianists took it as the good (modesty prevails ornament, people turned up with a manner of rough; ornament prevails modesty, people turned up with a manner of superficial; with reasonable modesty and ornament, you could act as a wise man.), or the Taoist thought it as the bad (“diverse colors made people feel dazzled”; “natural things keep the original feature, nothing people made could be better than them”), painting was always ranking after nature and morals with the service function of ornament and adding merits. As the expressive theory was proposed, people’s spirit was taken into account in the general appearance of a picture. Painting realized the “existence” with intrinsic quality, and achieved the same position as characters and literature with the independent value of existence. Certainly, the depth and width of expressing human’s spirit by painting still depended on the development of its skills and theories. Such development was gradually improved after Tang dynasty, but we could not deny the significance brought by the theory of function during the evolution in Wei and Jin dynasties, which determined the basic development direction of painting in the coming times.

Though in theory six-way by Xie He established the standard of comment or the method of creation, each method of the “ix-way was independent, which did not turn to be a full set of creation theory. Xie He said: “though there were six ways for painting, few painters can apply all six ways; from ancient times till now, most painters were good at one way.” (Xie, 1998). In his view, only a few of ancient painters could be good at all six ways, the painter who was good at one way should be a master. In addition, Gu Kaizhi, Zong Bing, Wang Wei and Xie He focused on the artistic conception and

feeling from the picture, but not referred to the spirit that was experienced and expressed from the angle of creators. How to change the situation that creation fell behind appraisal and realize the true union, it was the problem that following painting should overcome. It was till Tan dynasty that reasonable situation was present to solve such problem. In the view of researches of history of culture, Tang dynasty witnessed the turn of culture.

The New Zen was popular, new literature movement (i.e. ancient literature movement) spread and new confucianists grew up, these activities together promoted the new development of Chinese culture. Such three activities developed and lasted to the Northern Song dynasty. Main situation of culture after Song dynasty formed during these processes, which displayed the spirit of the intelligentsia during this period. Compared with the aristocracy formed since Wei and Jin dynasties, after the middle of Tang dynasty, the country went toward the civilian society. “Culture turn” after the middle of Tang dynasty was exactly the reflection of such “society change. (Chen, 1991)

It was just for the features of the times that brought new opportunity and situation for the development of painting of Tang dynasty. Firstly, it was the complete development of painting section, which related to the situation that the function of painting went further and the position of painting enhanced. Zhang Yanyuan ever gave analysis on the significance of painting in *Records of Famous Paintings in Past Dynasties –Narrate the Origin and Development of Painting*, which was concise and to the point:

As to painting, it could be for education, help to keeping morals, expression of various changes of the good and evil, prediction to details of the order of God, and painting have the same contribution as the six classical books of Buddhism, in which the law goes as the seasons circulates. Painting was originated form nature with primitive skills and asks for innovation, but not to create out of nothing or copy others’ thing. (Zhang, 1998, p.29)

Zhang Yanyuan directly imitated the theory of “morals” and “education” in Preface to Mao Poetry, equated painting with “the Five Classics, The Book of Songs”. He broke through the narrow scope of the function of warning, understood painting on the height of education and morals, carved out space for the development of paintings of mountains and rivers, flowers and birds. Because regards to the function of warning, paintings of mountains and rivers, flowers and birds could not have any play, but in light of the morals and education, such paintings could play a role as traditional painting of figures. Besides, “expression of various changes of the good and evil, prediction to details of the order of God” emphasized the nature of artistic imagination for painting, which further strengthened the significance of independence of painting, i.e. painting should not be necessarily dependent on the function of warning, but should have its own value. It also provided the basis of value for the paintings of mountains and rivers, flowers and birds that could not directly serve the social politics.

Secondly, it was the proposal of “ease” pattern. It was Li Sizhen who firstly came up with the “ease” pattern in theory of painting, while Zhu Jingxuan gave the most definite description in *Records of Famous Paintings in Tang Dynasty*: “There were paintings of pattern that went beyond the common ways”, “(Wang Mo, Li Lingxing, Zhang Zhihe) these three painters did not apply the traditional ways of painting, so we called their painting in ease pattern, because there was no similar works before, and I especially recorded it”. From the description of the creation conditions for these three painters by Zhu Jingxuan, it can be seen that since the middle of Tang dynasty, there was a trend of exploring and innovation arisen in the field of paintings of mountains and rivers, many painters tried to break through the limit of traditional way of figure painting, made research in brushwork of Chinese ink, thus they brought about conditions for the emergence of paintings of mountains and rivers in Chinese ink. Thirdly, it was the emergence of the theory of “internal thought and design”; this theory mainly came from the view of Zhang Zao: “Artistic creation should be originated from the learning from nature, but the internal thought and design of artist should also be the necessary process to change the natural beauty to the artistic aesthetics.” Besides the theory of painting by Zhang Zao, “internal thought and design” also often showed up in the written words of some Buddhists or literati and officialdom that were deeply influenced by Buddhism. The theory of “internal thought and design” put forward the realness of subjective mind during the artistic creation. As a way of behavior with some subjective spirit and feeling factor in some extent, the rationality of art was recognized. The theory “artistic creation should be originated from the learning from nature, but the internal thought and design of artist should also be the necessary process to change the natural beauty to the artistic aesthetics,” also affirmed the function of artistic intuition during artistic creation. Moreover, for the practice of detailed skills of painting, painters paid more and more attention to skills of stroke and ink. Just the saying of Zhang Yanyuan: “the most important pint of painting things was to realize the similar appearance, for the similarity of appearance; painters must express the feature of object. To achieve such effect, the essential point was the skills of stroke to express the internal thought.” (*Comment on the Six-way of Painting*). “Painters adopted various color to express the beauty of nature, if painters delivered the scene in nature by such colors, they had grasp the truth of nature.” (*Comment on the Theory of Painting*) (Zhang, 1998, pp.31-38)

Above new situation of painting occurred at the background of culture turn in Tang dynasty, especially after the middle of Tang dynasty. While in light of the realization of the function of painting since Wei

and Jin dynasties, such cultural turn had internal logic relationship. “Vivid artistic conception” achieved high position, but obviously “Six-way of Painting” could not achieve the perfect union of appraisal and creation, which called for the join of new content. Hence, on the basis of similar appearance, the artistic conception opened up new pattern and realm of expression-paintings of mountains and rivers, flowers and birds became more popular day by day, and such painting did not obey the traditional skills of panting of figure, formed its own expression system, under such condition, skills of stroke and ink got development and more attention. New look of painting brought by the new stroke and ink that was different from the style in Wei and Jin dynasties, directly lead to the proposal of “ease pattern ” and the view angle for appreciation of beauty by the theory of “internal thought and design”. In short, “vivid artistic conception “came from the stroke and ink, stroke and ink served the internal thought, while the internal thought originated from the personality and spirit of painter. In this way, by the support of “ease pattern” and theory of “internal thought and design”, as the highest creation principle and the top standard of appraisal “vivid artistic conception” realized the joint and achieved the union of such two sides, while the origin of force for union in the picture went to the application of stroke (ink).

4. TRANSMUTATION OF FUNCTIONS OF DRAWING

In regards to history, the change from emphasizing the colors to the focus on ink for painting occurred in Tang dynasty, such condition had direct relationship with the above analyzed independence painting and the evolution of function. In some extent, it was just for the requirement of expressing human spirit in the process of the independence of painting that lead to the change from the way of ornament painting to the method of ink painting, because this new method could express the feeling of painter in a better way, and it was more helpful to show the spirit of personality. If viewed from the angle of function, the function painting had gone through following process: record appearance-expressive- artistic conception-freehand. As a whole, it was the process of change from the drawing the object to express subjective feeling. While for the development of ink and stroke, it also had gone through a process: according to the practical state of the object to apply stroke (ink), gradually developed to adopt apply stroke (ink) in accordance to the need of feeling of the creator, i.e. draw appearance-imitate image-express thought-express internal conception, internal connecting link of those stages could be illustrated by following Table 1.

Table 1
Appearance-Imitate Image-Express Thought-Express Internal Conception, Internal Connecting Link

Evolution of the function	Appearance	Spirit	Artistic conception	Internal conception
Times	Qin and Han dynasties	Wei and Jin dynasties	Tang dynasty	Song and Yuan dynasties
Changes of Chinese ink	Material	Object	Mind	Internal conception
Artist	Gu Kaizhi	Wu Daozi	Zhang Zao	Su Shi

At the early stage of artistic development, as the theory generally went up with the requirement before the creation, so there was always a certain distance between the practice and theory, which also resulted in the certain delay of the expression of “artists”. Change of Chinese ink was also a gradual process. The painting of mountains and rivers started in Tang dynasty, while the development of painting of figure got perfect in Northern Song dynasty, and painting of flowers and birds witnessed the accomplishment of the change from focusing on color to emphasizing the ink till Yuan dynasty, therefore, the change of Chinese ink that we talked about here was mainly for ideas, it was not necessarily to find a direct correspondence in paintings. In fact, there is diverse formula for skills in different times. All formula became a full system after Yuan dynasty and formed a huge “acquisition” system. For example, painting of mountains and rivers, it was also because the ornament effect by green or black colors could not fully express the spirit of mountains and rivers that brought the exploring of ink with the trend of “paint realistically”, and the link between “paint realistically” and “express feeling by painting” came later on.

The logic of viewing the changes of ink and wash from the perspective of functional transmutation of drawing is only an aspect of the relationship between the two. Aside from this, the changes in expression of ink and wash can also be studied from the relationship

between drawing and calligraphy, between drawing and poetry, between drawing and literature and art theory, and between drawing and personality, etc.. This paper aims to explain the changes in expression of ink and wash from perspective of transmutation in functions of drawing, reflecting the process of change of ink and wash from being objective to being subjective, and from foreign object to the innermost being, and provides a point of view to understanding the Chinese ink and wash.

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