

An Analysis of Decoration Factors of Yuan Jiang's Landscape Paintings

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Abstract

Yuan Jiang is the most famous ruler painter in early Qing Dynasty, and his ruler painting is the best representative of his personal achievements. However, this paper does not analyze from the perspective of ruler painting too much, but studies the expression factors forming decoration aesthetics in Yuan Jiang's works from all aspects and multiple perspectives, so that the readers are able to know and discover Yuan Jiang's works more deeply. Yuan Jiang has inherited and adopted traditional painting forms in the creation of landscape paintings, especially Song Dynasty. It is not difficult to see the painting styles of Song Dynasty in his works. In addition, he also made use of the advantages of contemporary painters to create his own unique style. Yuan Jiang had a diversified painting forms including grand and magnificent mountains and rivers, attractive and peaceful scenery, works with special shapes and dense lines, and virtual and still works with less lines and more colors. Each work shows a rich sense of decoration from the appearance to the inner with plane characteristics.

Keywords: Yuan Jiang; landscape painting; decoration; creation

I. The decoration expression of plane composition in Yuan Jiang's landscape paintings

Plane creation of expression objects

Yuan Jiang Who styled himself as Wentao was a painter of Qing Dynasty, and he was from Jiangdu (Yangzhou of Jiangsu). Most of his landscape paintings are neat and beautiful with proper complication and simplicity, opening and closing, and scenery order. The technical expression for physical images has granted a rich decoration implication to his paintings, such as plane expression for physical images, unique shapes of rocks and neat and magnificent buildings, including flexible lines constituting the picture outline, expression of colors, etc. All these factors give Yuan Jiang's landscape paintings the plane decoration aesthetics.

In Yuan Jiang's landscape paintings of, some works pursue the plane processing for expression objects, focus on the creation of spatial form, don't pursue the three-dimensional factors of expression objects or the overall picture, but express the feelings directly. Such plane physical images and composition expression means that the painters abandon the real three-dimensional form, create an imaginary space, and comprehensively compare, divide the whole picture and form a physical image expression and picture layout with a strong sense of plane by means of point-to-plane, line-to-plane and leaving blank according to traditional painting aesthetic form. Yuan Jiang mainly used the methods of sketching and rendering in some works and weakened the use of traditional texturing method, and even some lines sketched were finally included into the picture by means of rendering. Yuan Jiang's landscape paintings showed the contemporary characteristics through the plane creation of expression objects. For example, the *Landscape and Pavilion 12* is a light purple landscape work of Yuan Jiang with elegant ink color and quiet spirit. The whole picture uses the main expression method of rendering without too much texturing, which gives the picture an implication of plane decoration. The expression objects in this painting such as trees, mountains, lake, etc have a sense of depth and skin texture effect with the method of rendering. A rich rhythmic line was sketched at the outline of close hillside where less trace of texturing can be seen, and the ups and downs of the hillside were rendered partly with ink and flower blue. The color of lake becomes light from the near to the distant, and the space is created in a form of plane. Then the shape of lake was created through rendering the bank and plants. This technique of expression is different with previous method of sketching the lake with lines, which puts forward the expression form of picture further. The rendering expression of the distant foggy and misty mountains is extremely clever. The lines sketched appear in a way of *moqu* by rendering, and the mountains show a little underpainting on a basis which is not light and thin, so that the distant mountains become virtual and transparent.

For another example, *Liangyuan Snow* uses ochre as the base color for the whole picture with light ink and virtual rendering, which is not superficial or annoying and shows a sense of thick and clear. It uses light purple as the main color of trees and pavilions. The dark side of stones is textured slightly and the light side is left blank. The lake is rendered gradually with light ink with dark color close and white in the distance to show an effect of virtual-real change. It is a great wonder of garden with bleak landscape of snow arriving. Yuan Jiang divided the picture into three parts of close, middle and distant with clear primary and secondary order and distinct gradation by means of overlooking

composition. The main garden is set as the middle landscape of the picture. He separated the picture with the radial depth of long corridor, which gives the picture a sense of form and decoration and can also guide the appreciator's sight to the most wonderful core of the main building. The whole picture has a large area of lake from the close water inside the garden with different sizes and shapes to the water outside the garden with vague distant landscape and mixed water and mist of which the density is clear at a glance. Yuan Jiang used the nothingness of a large area of water to set off the tightness of Liangyuan landscape. A distant mountain appears gleamingly at the position of water mist rises in the distance, which echoes with the close rocks inside the garden in terms of form, shape and ink color. The whole picture has a composition with unified gathering and scattering. It is scattered but not empty, and each scenery uses different line changes, light and dark ink color and virtual-real comparison to unify the overall relationship. It has a sense of decoration attracting people to stop to appreciate at the same time of highlighting the plane sense of physical image.

Uniqueness of rocks expression method

Chinese landscape paintings attach extreme importance to the expression method of rocks, and a variety of texturing expression methods are formed accordingly to express the textures of rocks of different landforms. This is also one of the points of “*Theory of Southern and Northern Schools*^①” formed by DONG Qichang of Ming Dynasty. The earliest landscape painting is the known *Spring Outing*^② of ZHAN Ziqian which uses the expression method of “sketching without texturing”. The method of texturing was formed gradually through continuous research and innovation of painters of later generations to express the texture of rocks. It makes the expression method of landscape paintings more diversified, much richer and much closer to the decoration expression. The earliest texturing methods of Chinese landscape paintings include rice point texturing, hemp texturing and axe texturing, which constitutes the three texturing systems of Chinese traditional landscape paintings. Then ox hair texturing, band texturing, ghost face texturing, lotus leaf texturing, cirrus texturing, firewood texturing, unlocking texture, etc have emerged successively in different periods, schools of painting and regions. Such rich texturing expression methods of rocks express the appearance of rocks more properly. The outstanding painters in each age were seeking a breakthrough and develop their own personalities and establish their own painting styles on the basis of inheriting and carrying forward the traditional paintings. As a ruler painter of landscape, Yuan Jiang also did so in the expression of rocks texturing and even established his own painting style.

In a lot of works of Yuan Jiang, the shapes of rocks are unique and full of decoration aesthetics. For example, in *Autumn Outing* the rocks are painted with tight and thick ink. They rise continuously, disconnect and connect partly, and occupy most of the picture. The structure of rocks is like terrifying waves and ghost face with amazing rhythm. It is rich in rhythm but has no trace to be found. The shapes of rocks are mostly painted with the method of cirrus texturing, and the inner side of rocks uses the little axe texturing or raindrop texturing or nailhead texturing, which makes the rocks complicated, thick and unique. Compared with the misty mountains rendered lightly in the extreme distance, the picture is unified as a whole in constant ^①Dong Qichang of Ming Dynasty proposed in *Essays on Painting* that southern school was the scholar paintings and the northern school as expert paints. He

praised the southern school and belittled the northern school, which affected the painting development in the late Ming Dynasty and Qing Dynasty.

②Spring Outing is a work of Zhan Ziqian of Sui Dynasty using silk and dark green which is stored in Beijing National Palace Museum.

conflict between dynamic and static, complicated and simple. The rocks in *Epang Palace* were painted in the same way with grotesque cirrus shapes. Yuan Jiang sketched the outline of rocks with thin and powerful lines, then textured and rendered gently and finely with light ink to show the light and dark sides of rocks and enhance the sense of volume. By virtual and real combination of the ink, the small rocks among the large rocks are towering, turning, lying or hanging with a proper density and clever interspersions, showing an extremely touching form and aesthetics. In the rocks expression, Yuan Jiang pursued the change of rhythm for shapes, constantly created contradictions and conflicts for texturing, and finally formed an organic integrity with unification of external shapes, and such an expression form and expression language would bring a strong visual impact to the appreciators.

Decoration factors of pavilion ruler paintings in Yuan Jiang's landscape paintings

Ruler painting occupies a very important position in Chinese painting history with a unique painting tool of ruler. It has a precise, vigor and ordered expression form. On one hand, the development of ruler painting is resulted from the hard work of painters, on the other hand, the later generations can see a few shapes and styles of ancient extinct buildings from the ruler paintings, which has a great significance for the fields of architecture and history. GU Kaizhi of Eastern Jin Dynasty said in *Painting Theories* that “the pavilions are fixed, it is difficult to paint but easy to do it well, so do not try to achieve by a chance with highly skills^①”, then ZHAN Ziqian, Li and his son et al of Sui and Tang Dynasties made ruler painting independent, and then it reached a peak in Song and Yuan Dynasties. The scholar painting was popular in Yuan Dynasty and ruler painting encountered a rejection, until Qing Dynasty, ruler painting developed under the respect and praise of Yuan Jiang and Yuan Yao and the painters from Ruyi Gallery and became an inimitable art. The ruler painters from Ruyi

①Gu Kaizhi of East Jin Dynasty has three works survived today including Paintings of Wei and Jin Dynasties, *Painting Theories* and *Painting of Yuntai Maintain*. He proposed the opinions of expression of spirit, guard the spirit with form, achieve by a chance with highly skills, etc, which have laid a foundation for Chinese traditional painting.

Gallery of Qing Dynasty served the ruling class at that time, so the painting techniques were too inflexible. But Yuan Jiang's ruler paintings are neat but not inflexible, and they are also innovative. For the decoration factors, the pavilions in Yuan Jiang's ruler paintings have both magnificent buildings with rich and bright colors and small courtyards rendered lightly holding banquet for entertainment. For example, in *Epang Palace* Yuan Jiang reproduced the grand and palatial Qin palace in his painting with extremely imaginative creativity. Each brick, tile, stone and leaf are sketched elaborately and finely. The picture shows a large-scale cooperation at the macro level, and the micro fine details enhance the sense of decoration constantly under the plane expression. The pavilions in the painting have complicated styles and delicate shapes. He expressed the eave, wall, pillar, decoration

and pattern with fine lines to constantly grant a characteristic of decoration to the picture. Then he rendered the cover partly with bright but not boring color, the tiles and roof with warm ocher, the cornice with high-purity azurite, the door with mineral green, the pillars with bright red and the stylobate with white and pink. The continuous interval and comparison of cool and warm colors makes the building steady and thick with fresh and rich colors. For another example, *Drunk* describes a corner of courtyard where a drunk minister is going back. Because it is a night scenery, dusk is spreading in the picture, which makes the courtyard which should be magnificent become darker in the shades of night. It is difficult to see the complete building due to the method of taking a fragment of scenery, and this painting is also different with other landscape paintings of Yuan Jiang. The lines and shapes of buildings in the painting use the style of Yuan Jiang which are complicated and diversified and rich in characteristic of decoration. It is in contrast to the flexible lines of figure's clothes texture, and the picture becomes flexible between dynamic and static. The picture shows less western perspective principle, but Yuan Jiang used the radial depth of rocky road and dynamic state of people looking at each other in the distance to create a sense of space in plane expression. Although this is a work of ruler painting, it presents a quiet and elegant atmosphere based on the thick ink which is different with other ruler paintings with bright colors, showing the strong painting skills of Yuan Jiang. Ruler painting expresses with its own lines and colors with extremely strong sense of decoration, while Yuan Jiang is famous for ruler paintings, however, Yuan Jiang's ruler paintings have diversified forms, rich contents and unique creativity, so the pictures is not clumsy and dull. At the same time of showing a sense of decoration, it also inspires the appreciator's mind and soul.

Decoration implication of “leaving blank” in Yuan Jiang's landscape paintings

“Leaving blank” is a unique expression form and language in Chinese landscape paintings. The influence of Taoism thought and base of materials including Chinese art paper, ink, etc have laid the foundation of “leaving blank”. The contents left blank in landscape paintings are generally cloud, water and sky which are formed through other landscape with ink and colors, although it is “blank”, it contains all sceneries of mountains, rivers, lakes, sea, etc and plays a role of decoration and comparison.

Also with *Epang Palace* as an example, Yuan Jiang has left a large area of blank for the whole picture. He used the blank to set off the subject and expressed the magnificence of picture with the visual sense that the river and sky are the same color. Yuan Jiang rendered the close water with light ink and sketched the water wave with rhythmic lines. The water wave can only be seen closer to the picture, and the water and mist in the distance are rendered gently with the light ink of the same color, which shaded the pavilions, terraces, mountains and trees in the distance. The close Cloud and mist rise on the left and right, partly shading the mountains, rocks, trees, buildings and figures. In the middle, we can see high mountains and long rivers with could and mist surrounded. The thickness of rocks emphasizes the lightness of cloud. The large area of cloud reveals the height and beauty of mountains. The buildings and corridors were interspersed like a worldly paradise. In the distance, the cloud, water and sky intertwine and reflect each other, and the fine and delicate point sceneries add the readability and decoration of the picture. The “blank” in the picture is the objective manifestation of

Yuan Jiang's subjective imagery. Read more, and it will give you more aftertaste. The delicacy of painting theory is all about the blank.

Yuan Jiang's *Vertical Landscape* is a work with methods of both realistic painting and freehand painting. The corner composition shows styles of Ma Yuan and Xia Gui, and personal style of Yuan Jiang himself. There is also a large area of blank in this picture. In the close scenery, the close rocks are painted with thick ink. In the middle and distant sceneries, the rocks are among the clouds and sky with an extremely virtual-real comparison, distinct aesthetics of form and sufficient sense of decoration. In the middle scenery, the pavilions are shaded by the cloud and mist. The blank of cloud and mist is virtual and also real. The delicate shapes of clouds and mists set off the pavilions appropriately. In the distance, the mountains are rendered gently with light color between partly virtual and partly real, which forms a contrast to the close scenery and can also strengthen the height of sky and cloud. The whole picture shows a sharp contrast between black and white, unified ink color, ordered composition, interspersion of virtual and real, etc which constitutes the sense of peace and classic elegance, and the decoration implication formed accordingly is also extremely strong.

II. Decorative expression of “line” and “color” in Yuan Jiang's landscape paintings

Flexible expression of line

Ink is of great importance for Chinese paintings, especially sketching which is the expression of lines, and it is also the main method of shape expression of Chinese paintings. Because the expression of objective objects and split of picture layout with lines requires changes of lines in expression methods through length, thickness, straightness, moistness and rhythm, and it provides a reliable foundation for decorative expression of picture. Yuan Jiang used rhythmic lines in landscape paintings such as the line expression of rocks and trees. He also used freehand lines to sketch the rocks and trees loosely but following the rules. The lines are partly hidden and partly visible, partly connected and partly disconnected. Some works are sketched with realistic lines with buildings of rule painting as a representative. The pavilions are sketched with fine, neat and ordered lines, so that the structure of building is extremely rigorous and shows a strong sense of decoration. The two painting methods have a contrast between dynamic and static, simple and complicated and increase the decoration expression of plane arts. It can be proved in *Spring Outing of Han Palace*. This is a work of Yuan Jiang with methods of both realistic painting and freehand painting. The buildings have delicate shapes and complicated structure. They are sketched with fine line accurately. The rocks and trees in the distance are painted flexibly, loosely, orderly with clear rhythm. There is a distinct contrast between the two methods of painting. The tight and loose, complicated and simple, hard and soft are unified into the whole picture in conflict, showing a strong sense of decoration

Snow and Pavilion of Yuan Jiang uses the method of corner composition. The water and sky are rendered wholly with the same color, and the rocks and roof is the highlight of the whole picture, showing a leak winter scenery and peaceful atmosphere. The lines are direct and clear. The close rocks and trees are sketched with powerful lines. The lines in the light and dark sides have different thickness and clear rhythmic change. The middle pavilion uses lines with dark ink color but also with a lot of similar-thickness lines with light ink interspersing, showing the rigorousness and neatness of

pavilion. The distant mountain peak and foot use fine and long lines with ink color at some turning points darker than the water and sky, and the lines of other places are mixed with the ink color of water and sky. The sense of virtual and real is expressed thoroughly and vividly in the lines. The lines of close rocks and distant rocks show a contrast between the dynamic and static, complicated and simple, attracting the appreciator's sight to the pavilion.

Subjective color decoration

Theory of Six Principles of Painting is a summary of Xie He of Southern Qi Dynasty for characteristics of Chinese painting. It has been used until now for a thousand years and still provides the theoretical basis of Chinese painting to the learners of Chinese painting. Xie He put forward the idea of "rendering according to different objects^①", which does not mean coloring shall totally follow the real colors demonstrated by the nature. It is different with western color principle, and the painters can enhance, exaggerate or weaken the color of expression object according to their own subjective imageries and picture demands, so the color expression has strong subjectivity and decoration and represents the symbolic significance on color classification. In the traditional paintings, the use of color was the most prosperous in Tang and Song Dynasties. The master works emphasizing the color of mountains, water, palace ladies, flowers and leaves emerged constantly in this period, but after the scholar paintings appeared in Yuan Dynasty, the painters paid attention to the plain and peaceful expression of ink and always used the method of light rendering when using colors to express in the works. At that time, Yuan Jiang of Qing Dynasty formed his own unique coloring style through sorting out the works of predecessors and his special perception for the nature, and he brought this excellent artistic form back to people's sight. From the works of Yuan Jiang, we will discover that the rocks and trees in his

^①The six principles of Xie He is the standard and important aesthetic principle for judging Chinese ancient artistic works, including rhythmic vitality, bone sketching, real object-like, rendering according to different objects, location and imitating.

Most landscape paintings are expressed with light purple and the buildings in the ruler paintings are painted with heavy colors. The two coloring methods are unified in the picture with a strong contrast of chroma, and the subjective plane color decoration also shows the strong control of Yuan Jiang for colors.

For example, *Lishan Summer* has ordered opening and closing, rocks, trees, rivers, lakes and seas with thick ink and light color and Huaqing Place buildings and figures sketched finely and rendered with heavy colors, so that the buildings in the core of picture do not look small in contrast to the high mountains, but they are set off as delicate, solemn and magnificent. Yuan Jiang wholly rendered the tiles with high-purification azurite and mineral green, partly rendered the peripheral column with Chinese red, and the contrastive decoration of cool and warm colors make the palace more luxury. The stylobate was partly rendered with white and pink orderly to set off the solemn and elegant white jade handrail. The buildings of front and rear halls are also separated through the stylobate, and the thick

color of hall is not isolated but unified into the integrity. The pavilions, booths, bridges and handrails are hidden among the distant mountains. They are sketched accurately and rendered with thick azurite and mineral green which is highlighted but not breaks away and echoes with the main palace in terms of shape and color. It is different with western perspective principle, and this expression form of scattered points greatly enriches the decoration of tradition landscape paintings. The figures in the picture are in threes and fours with different postures, and thick but different clothing colors. The expression of point sceneries also enriches the content of picture and increases the ornamental value of picture. The rocks use a little thick ink and are rendered with light ochre and some light mineral green. The trees are rendered with heavy colors at intervals based on the thick ink color in order to reduce the lightness, enrich the colors of picture and set off the main buildings. The distant marshland and mountains are rendered virtually with light colors and ink which is changeable. This picture shows a grand momentum and fine details which is very impressive. We have to highly praise the superb skills and expression methods with great originality of Yuan Jiang which gives his works an extremely strong sense of decoration and makes people indulge in the wonderland.

Again for *Vertical Landscape (2-2-2)*, it shows an elegant and fine atmosphere and the large area of blank has added lots of decoration factors for the whole picture and makes the contrast between middle and distance sceneries much stronger. The picture uses the method of light purple coloring. The painter only added heavy mineral green with decreased lightness to the cornice and handrail of close pavilion. Other places such as close trees and distant mountains are rendered with light color which is very elegant. Especially for the coloring of distant mountains, the painter rendered with very light mineral green and rendered virtually with azurite in the more distance. The interaction of water, cloud and sky blank makes the distant mountains more misty, which strengthens the virtual and real contrast to the close scenery. The figures in the pavilion are resting and talking. The color of clothes is very plain and light, which is quite different with the decoration of figures in the palace and also reveals the peaceful and elegant theme of the whole picture. The two paintings of Yuan Jiang use different coloring expression methods and bring different visual enjoyments to people, which also indicates that Yuan Jiang is a painter with subjective creativity. His works not only respect the nature, but also express his own inner feelings and convey the decoration implication of subjective color expression with the plane characteristics.

In conclusion, Chinese art of painting is extensive and profound. In the history, the author is mostly impressed by the charm presented by Yuan Jiang's paintings, meticulous painting attitude and passion for painting. Yuan Jiang is famous for his superb ruler painting techniques, but his creativity for other expression objects in paintings can not be underestimated. Both the grand landscape and local scenery can present their own momentums and artistic conceptions in the paintings of Yuan Jiang, and Yuan Jiang showed the unique form and content of his works with his outstanding painting talent in terms of composition, sketching and coloring. Many works of Yuan Jiang survived and are available now, which is greatly helpful for the author to study the decoration factors of Yuan Jiang's landscape paintings. The author analyzes the reasons for this form through the decoration factors in his landscape paintings and achieves such appeal in its own creation.

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