



Research on Color Application and Composition between Chinese Painting and Western Painting

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Abstract

Color is a symbolic art sign both in Chinese and Western painting since antiquity, possessing visual artistic tension. Distinct color expressions can reflect not only the distinctive style of the artist but also the cultural background of the society. In terms of visual elements, color has expressive power so that viewers can perceive themselves as if they are in such a simulated environment through pictures and integrate them into the paintings to perceive the connotation of art. Structurally, composition refers to anything on the screen, including the combination of abstract and figurative forms. The artist conveys the structure of the painting through a variety of lines, shapes, proportions and other elements according to their own designs through the structure. This dissertation analyzes the reasons for the differences in color and composition in painting from different perspectives in China and the West, namely the comprehensive influence of differences in traditional culture, theory and aesthetics.

Keywords

Color, Composition, Chinese painting, Western painting, Variation

1. Introduction

The factors affecting the color and composition between Chinese and Western art are more complex, such as historical background, social environment and religion. These elements make the composition, medium, tone, and perspective in Chinese and Western paintings all unique.

2. Variations in composition between Chinese and Western painting

In Western aesthetics, composition in art consists of eight elements, namely unity, balance, movement, rhythm, focus, contrast, pattern and proportion (Boddy-Evans, 2021). The composition in the painting is a plane ladder, or two-dimensional or plane perspective, so when painting, the artists focus on depicting the depth of the well and light and shadow, and even use mathematical means to calculate the perfect ratio in the artwork. In the West, perspective is achieved by directing the drawing's lines towards two hypothetical vanishing points, resulting in parallel or equidistant lines converging on the picture plane. This type of projection depends on the non-Euclidean geometric definition of parallel lines that meet at infinity. Western artists use the principle of perspective to realistically make the pictures in their works, so that the pictures have a sense of space and layers. The picture below is the fresco "Scuola di Atene" created by Raphael, which uses architecture and perspective to the extreme, with the arches leading to the blue sky as the background, making the picture extraordinarily sacred and distant.

White space is a unique composition method in Chinese painting, and it is a significant form of artistic expression. The basis of Chinese painting is line modeling, coloring according to the type, and vivid charm. White space is not unfinished, empty, or unfilled space. These voids appear to be empty. In contrast, they are an integral part of Chinese painting. The painters believe that it can stimulate the viewer's thinking and imagination. With the combi-

nation of writing brush and ink, the unique artistic conception of Chinese painting is formed. Compared with Western painters, Chinese painters have adopted a specific way to emphasize spatial information. Besides the typical way of arranging in spatial position, by drawing a distant view in the upper half of the frame and a close view in the lower half, or by determining the distance according to the size of the object, the most common way of implying distance is to put parallel diagonal lines. Draw from the plane of the image (Bao et al., 2016). In landscape painting and flowers-and-birds painting, the combination of blank space and distance is more like dynamic picture than static perspective space. In contrast, Western painting is based on sketches, and the basic characteristic is realism, including the concept of painting creation, hence there is no blank space in Western artworks, any imaged elements are colored. The famous Chinese painter Zhang Daqian painted "Sail shadow of Dongting Lake" in 1960. This painting is divided into three levels: front, middle and far. The distant peaks are outlined with light ink, and some peaks are decorated with thick ink. The use of dark and light ink colors shows the layering of the mountain peaks. The processing method of leaving blank in the middle makes the picture pure and empty, and only a few strokes can depict the gurgling water and sail shadows. The agile water patterns and white space in the picture make people immersed in the lake surface and feel the tranquil atmosphere.



Figure 1. Raphael "Scuola di Atene", 1509.



Figure 2. Zhang Daqian "Sail shadow of Dongting Lake", 1960.

3. Color Difference and Chimerism of Traditional Culture

People's perception of color originates from psychology. When people try to describe and find resonance with color, the words they choose are related to cultural background, such as brick red, cherry red, etc. (Gage, 1990).

The color of Chinese painting focuses on freehand brushwork, while Western painting focuses on realism. Chinese painting is also known as ink painting. Artists mix ink with different proportions of water, mix it into different colors such as burnt ink, thick ink, light ink, etc., and then draw it on rice paper by writing brush. During the Yuan Dynasty, it became a common phenomenon for painters to add calligraphy and poetry to their landscape works, which represented the chimera of traditional culture. Due to the thin and transparent material of rice paper, painters generally need to form in one stroke, rather than repeatedly modifying, which also limits the painters to use colors to superimpose. Nevertheless, they could show the distance of the picture through the depth of the color, hence it is necessary to draw the distant scene first, and then draw the close scene. The pigments of Chinese painting generally use mineral pigments, vegetable pigments or chemical pigments. Except for a few mineral pigments, most mineral pigments have the characteristics of poor permeability, opacity, and strong hiding power, which could maintain their bright colors for thousands of years. Plant pigments and chemical pigments have good permeability and high transparency while the covering power of these pigments is general. Therefore, color cannot be used to cover color in Chinese painting. This is why Chinese painting needs to be accurately created rather than avoiding repeated revisions.

The color of Western paintings has a high connection with the historical background. During the Baroque period, painters pursued luxury, and strong romanticism paid attention to the sense of space and three-dimensionality of their works and had an intensive religious color. The development of optics in the 19th century enabled the artists of the Impressionist period to objectively depict the fleeting moments in visual reality, mainly expressing pure light. It advocates outdoor sketching, directly depicting objects in the sun, and abandons the brown tones that have changed little since the 16th century. And Neo-Impressionism further developed the pursuit of the expression of light and color in painting. Therefore, in oil paintings, people can intuitively appreciate the position of light and shadow, and the delicate realistic style makes the scenery or figures in the picture more vivid.

4. Theoretical Variations between Chinese and Western Painting Colors

The earliest Western color theory came from the Greek philosopher Aristotle, who believes that the four basic colors are related to nature. Afterward, scientist Isaac Newton discovered the color spectrum, that is, clear light consists of seven visible colors (Esaak, 2020). 40,000 years ago, artists utilized materials, including soil, animal fat and burnt charcoal, creating a basic five colors: red, yellow, brown, black and white, which were taken from nature (Sarah, 2016). The colors of paintings in the Renaissance pursued reality, and the colors of the works were required to be drawn according to the original colors of the objects.

"Five Colors", a significant concept of Chinese color culture, is the most far-reaching traditional color view in China. Under the promotion of Pre-Qin scholars, a complete set of color theory combined with the view of nature was gradually formed, among white, green, black, red and yellow are regarded as the positive colors, corresponding to the five elements of gold, wood, water, fire and earth respectively. In addition, five colours also represents the east, west, south, north, medium five directions, the concept was first documented in *"The Artificers' Record"*, "mixed colours, the east is called green, the south is called red, the West is called white, the North is called black, the heaven is symbolized red, the earth is symbolized yellow." The five colors correspond not only to the five directions, but also to the four seasons of spring, summer, autumn and winter. Among them, the blue color symbolizes the green dragon representing the mild spring, and the red color symbolizes the rosebird, which is the color of flame burning, namely summer. White symbolizes cool autumn, and then black is the cold winter, representing the immensity; yellow represents soil, a symbol of vitality. Under the influence of Confucianism, color aesthetics thought associated color with moral standards such as "benevolence", "virtue" and "goodness", and normalized the five colors as orthodox colors, from which other colors were derived. Chinese color is an abstract image, not to imitate nature, but to convey the artistic conception.

5. Cultural Variation

Painting is the carrier of art as well as culture, therefore the cultural variation between China and the West can be directly expressed in artistic works. Western painting is influenced by religion. Therefore, Western painters believe

that the performance of realistic natural scenes is a belief. During the Renaissance, artists used religious stories as the themes for their creations. For example, Raphael's creation of the Madonna was highly related to Christianity, and they all reflected humanistic thought with the tender image of motherhood. By contrast, Chinese painting is influenced by Buddhism, Confucianism, and especially Taoist philosophy, which attempts to show a sense of harmony between human beings and the whole world, which allows painters to incorporate their personal feelings and emotions into the landscape. For instance, Wu Daozi, a famous painter in the Tang Dynasty, whose creative achievements were first manifested in religious paintings, created more than 300 murals in his life, most of which were painted for temples.

6. Conclusion

Historically, the use of color and structure in Chinese and Western painting is various. The exchanges between modern countries have also accelerated the pace of cultural integration of various countries, and cultural exchanges will lead to the new generation of painting styles.

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