The Comparison between Chinese Ink-wash Painting and Western Oil Painting

Name: Mao Kewen

University Name: Henan Normal University

E-mail: 964901271@qq.com

Phone Number: 13072612756
The Comparison between Chinese ink-wash Painting and Western Oil Painting

Abstract: Chinese ink-wash painting focuses on image, while western oil painting is more realistic. The paper aims to analyze the cause of the difference in six aspects, including the usage of lines, perspective, anatomy, the background of paintings, the subject of paintings and painting tools.

Keywords: line, perspective, anatomy, background, subject, tool

Introduction: Chinese ink-wash painting and western oil painting both occupy the important position in the painting field. However, they have different painting techniques. The study of these two kinds of painting styles is not only good for promoting the development of painting, but also good for the exchange of culture between China and western countries. The paper will compare Chinese ink-wash painting and western oil painting in six aspects, including the usage of lines, perspective, anatomy, background, subject and painting tools.

I. Chinese ink-wash painting consists of lines while the lines in western oil painting only function as outline.

Chinese ink-wash painting consists of lines, if we remove all the lines, the picture will be blank; for western oil painting, the usage of lines only functions as outline. If these lines are removed, the painting is still clearly visible. In fact, western oil painting is formed by thousands of surfaces. This difference, in some degree, is concerned with the difference of painting tools between Chinese ink-wash painting and western oil
II. Chinese ink-wash paintings uses “cavalier perspective”, while western oil painting uses “focus perspective”.

Perspective is the manifestation of three-dimensional objects in the plane. Western oil painting aims to reproduce the objects. So perspective is a basic skill. Da Vinci once said that the artist must take the mirror as a teacher. Western painters put many efforts in pursuit of three-dimensional effect in the two-dimensional paper. More precisely, they use “focus perspective”, that is, the painter focuses on one point while painting. However, Chinese ink-wash painting does not pay attention to perspective. If we see Chinese ink-wash painting from the perspective of physics, it might turn out to be incorrect. In fact, Chinese ink-wash painters use a method called “cavalier perspective”, that is, painters change their focus constantly while painting. By means of “cavalier perspective”, painters can describe a vast realm. So some Chinese ink-wash painting are meters or hundreds of meters long.

Looking at the western oil painting, most of them are about the city streets, houses, furniture, utensils and so on, we will find that the proportion of the object is definitely correct, and the object is nearly the same as the real thing. And when we appreciate a western oil painting about a corridor, it seems that the corridor is miles far away. However, Chinese painters generally will not take city streets, houses, furniture, utensils and other obvious three-dimensional things as their subject. They prefer clouds, mountains, trees, waterfalls, which look more like two-dimensional. If they accidentally paint furniture, they will also do not pay attention to perspective, instead,
they paint it causally. For example, a Chinese ancient painter called Zheng Banqiao, he is good at painting bamboos. But we can see from his painting, he just describe the main features of bamboo, but every detail.

In a word, Chinese ink-wash painting emphasizes the prominent characteristics of the object, so there is no need to pay attention to perspective. However, the western painting aims to reproduce the objects, so they try their best to make the best use of focus perspective to make it more real.

III. Chinese ink-wash painting does not pay attention to anatomy, while anatomy is a basic skill in western oil painting.

Anatomy is the study of the shape of human skeleton and muscles. For westerners, when they start to learn how to paint people, they must learn anatomy. Because western paintings emphasize realistic style, that is, the painting must like a real human. This anatomy is specially named “anatomy for art students” here. It is different from physiological anatomy which studies the structure and physiological functions of each part of human body. But the students who take this course also have to memorize the names of all parts of skeletons and muscles, and all kinds of changing shapes of them, which is a arduous task, but it is a basic skill.

However, the Chinese figure painters never need this skill. For Chinese painters, when they paint peoples, the don't pay attention to the characters' size and proportion which may be not physically proper in their painting, but the prominent characteristics of the character. So in Chinese ink-wash painting, men may look odd, and not proportionate. And most women in the painting are in extremely slender shape. So if
we see Chinese figure painting from a scientific perspective, the shape of their bodies will look terribly awful. But this does no harm, but the shining point of Chinese ink-wash painting. Chinese ink-wash painting pursues the strong impression, so exaggerate the characteristics of the painting objects. For men figures, the painter will increase their machismo; for women figures, they will make them look more slender and fragile. Chinese ink-wash painters focus on image, but realism.

IV. Chinese ink-wash painting is always presented without a background to highlight its characteristics while western oil painting always has a background in order to make it more real.

From the comparison among a lot of paintings, we can find that, Chinese ink-wash painting can be presented without a background to highlight its characteristics, while western oil painting must have a background in order to make it more real.

For Chinese ink-wash painting, to draw plum, there is just a twig hanging in the air, surrounded by blank; to draw people, there is a man just hanging in the air, like floating clouds.; a very long paper, just added a strain of vegetation or some stones, can become a vertical amplitude. Western oil painting is different, everything must have a background, if the painting is about objects, the background may be a table. If it is about people, the background is indoor or outdoor.

The different usage of background also lies in the different painting concept. Western oil painting is realistic, using background to increase reality. However, Chinese ink-wash painters omit the description of background and make bold use of blank to highlight the theme.
V. **The main subject of Chinese ink-wash painting is scenery while the main subject of western oil painting is people.**

Before the Han Dynasty, the main subject of Chinese ink-wash painting is about people. When it came to Tang Dynasty, the independent landscape painting came into being. Since then, landscape painting has occupied the core position in Chinese painting. This is because that Chinese scholars take mountains and waters as a kind of medium of cultivating themselves. From the Chinese landscape painting, we can understand the Chinese artistic concept of the whole Chinese painting. No other Chinese painting genre like Chines landscape painting can express Chinese culture and spirit more precisely.

Since Greek times, western oil painting has taken people as the main subject. Browsing western oil painting, we can see that the western paintings which are about people nearly accounted all. The subject of the religious paintings in the medieval is also about people. When it came to the nineteenth Century, the independent landscape painting came into being. But figure painting is still the main subject of western oil painting.

VI. **The difference of painting tools between Chinese ink-wash painting and western oil painting.**

The different effect between Chinese ink-wash painting and western oil painting is somewhat caused by the different painting tools.

For Chinese ink-wash painting, "brush, ink, paper and ink stone" is indispensable tools for Chinese ancient scholars, known as "the scholar's four jewels"; the
significance of which is beyond writing and painting. Chinese scholars attach profound cultural connotation and emotion to them.

Brush: Brush was created in China which is divided into hard, soft, and medium. The hard Brush is made of the tail of yellow weasel, while the soft brush is made of the goat's beard. According to the different painting types, and personal habits, there will be different choices.

Ink: Ink is cold-colored, so it is supposed to have a sense of coldness and the tone of it should be gloomy. But why we will have a warm sense and won't feel the gloomy tone when we appreciate good ink-wash paintings? This is because good ink-wash paintings make good use of the blank and create a sense of warmth through coordination.

Xuan paper: Xuan paper is divided into unripe paper and processed paper. Unripe paper is unprocessed by alum water. Ink can penetrate the paper easily, producing all kinds of changes. Painters take advantage of this effect to do freehand artistic creation. Processed paper is processed by alum water. Ink can not penetrate it easily. Painters use this kind of paper to make exquisite description.

Ink stone: Ink stone is used to grind to produce ink. So it should be easy to create ink, and the ink should be smooth and without slag.

For western oil painting, pigment, turpentine, glazing oil, oil painting brush and painting knife are required. The colorful description of western oil painting has a very strong visual impact.

Pigment: Pigment has two categories, mineral and chemical. The properties of
pigment are related to the composition of the chemical. Adverse reaction may happen among different pigments while modulation. Therefore, acquainting the properties of the pigment is helpful to maintain the color of the painting.

**Turpentine:** Turpentine is a kind of volatile medical oil to dilute the pigment during the process of modulation in western oil painting. After one or two minutes, turpentine will completely volatilize. Adding toning oil to turpentine will speed up the pigment to dry and make the color brighter.

**Glazing oil:** Glazing oil is applied when the painting is completed to maintain the gloss and prevent the air to pollute the painting.

**Oil painting brush:** Brush, made of elastic animal hair, most of them are flat headed, which explained why Chines ink-wash painting consists of lines, while western oil painting consist of thousands of spaces, which we have discussed before.

**Painting knife:** Painting knife, also called a palette knife, is made of thin steel sheet and is used to mix the pigment on the palette. Many artists directly use the painting knife to draw on the canvas.

**Conclusion:**

In spite of the last point, the first five points including the usage of lines, perspective, anatomy, background or subject, they all embody a prominent difference between Chinese ink-wash painting and western oil painting.

That is, Chinese ink-wash painting focuses on image. Chinese painters pursue their own understanding, not sameness. When you appreciate a Chinese ink-wash painting,
you may have a feeling of deja vu, but you can't speak out precisely which object the painting really refers to in reality. However, western oil painting aims to reproduce the objects objectively. By using scientific methods including perspective, anatomy, light and color, the detailed description of western painting has a very strong visual impact.

Reference:


[2] Feng Zikai, The Comparison between Chinese Painting and Western Painting

[3] Landscape Painting, Baidu Encyclopedia

[4] ink-wash Painting, Baidu Encyclopedia

[5] Chinese Painting, Baidu Encyclopedia


[8] Word Famous Paintings,

http://www.360doc.com/content/11/0114/12/2198695_86452206.shtml