

Analysis of the Artistic Characteristics of Literati Paintings

Wenwei Fan^{1,*}

¹The Anhui University of Finance and Economics School of Art, Bengbu, Anhui Province, 233030, China

* Corresponding author: Fan Wenwei (Email: fzaoxiangtai@163.com)

Abstract: As a unique form of Chinese traditional painting, literati painting has its own distinctive features and far-reaching influence compared with other schools. Through the combination of literati painting with nature, personal feelings and social environment, it expresses the unique artistic style and unique aesthetic concept. At the same time, the literati paintings also reflect the extensive knowledge and noble sentiment of the Chinese literati and officialdom, and carry a wealth of historical and cultural connotations. It is believed that the active study and inheritance of literati paintings will promote the development and innovation of Chinese painting and contribute more wonderful works and ideas to the art world. This article through to the literati painting origin, the main style characteristic and the creation theme thorough analysis, demonstrated the literati painting in the Chinese traditional painting unique status and the importance.

Keywords: Zhu liangzhi, Literati painting, Artistic features.

1. The Origin of Literati Painting

Chinese literati painting is a culturally rich form of traditional Chinese painting that uses brush and ink to express the spirit and emotion of Chinese culture. Like other forms of culture and art, literati painting shows us historical, cultural and aesthetic developments, providing a way to understand Chinese cultural aesthetic preferences and to perceive the world.

Chinese literati painting has a long history, with origins dating back to ancient China. In ancient times, painting was regarded as an important cultural activity, both as an aesthetic activity and as a cultural heritage. The subjects of ancient paintings were often myths and legends or religious beliefs, such as the Fuxi and Xuanyuan drawings, both of which are among the most famous mythological and legendary motifs in early China. Over time, painting became an art form with cultural connotations and aesthetic experiences, and developed to its peak during the Tang and Song dynasties, as well as the Ming and Qing dynasties. Early Chinese literati painters were known for their poetry, music, calligraphy and painting. Most of them were not formally trained in art, but with their unique perspective and in-depth observation of the natural world, they painted many works with a distinctive flavor and rhyme. There were some outstanding literati painters during the Tang Dynasty and the Five Dynasties, who often referred to each other, borrowed and innovated, and formed a unique style of literati painters.

The Song Dynasty was the golden age of Chinese literati painting, when culture and art reached their peak. The Northern Song government's strategic policy of "ruling the country through literature" greatly improved the social status of the literati, who had more opportunities to enter the government. The government set up the Shilin Museum, Da Guan Ge and other painting academies, widely accepted scholars, formed a systematic learning painting skills and cultivate the mechanism of aesthetic thinking, which is also the literati painters in this period to heel the matter of one of the important conditions of the increase in Hua. If it is said that Wang Wei in the Tang Dynasty as a scholar opened the

precedent of literati painting, then Su Shi as a model of ancient literati participated in painting, and put forward the concept of "literati painting" for the first time.[1]Su Shi's paintings, except for the "Dead Wood and Strange Stones", have been rarely circulated, but his idea of conveying the literati's spirit through paintings established the status of literati paintings in the Northern Song Dynasty painting world. His idea of literati painting was more fully embodied in the "Rice Dot Landscapes" created by Mi Fu and Mi Youren. The landscape paintings of Mi's father and son, with their "ink play" approach, abandoned all utilitarianism in painting and expressed the literati's view of life as a "pleasure-seeking heart," which largely influenced the development of literati painting.

It can be seen that the origin of Chinese literati painting goes back to the ancient times of China, and through the evolution of the Tang, Song, Ming and Qing dynasties, it has gradually formed a unique style in spirit and form. Literati painting is an important part of traditional Chinese culture, which not only represents the peak of Chinese painting, but is also one of the essences of Chinese civilization.

2. Main Stylistic Features of Literati Painting

As an important school of Chinese painting tradition, literati painting emphasizes the expression of the artist's personality and reverence for nature and the painter's deep understanding of the inner world and nature. The stylistic characteristics of literati painting can be elaborated from many aspects, and the following will discuss in detail the stylistic characteristics of literati painting, such as reverence for nature, plainness and simplicity, as well as elegance and elegance.

2.1. Revere nature

Literati painting emphasizes the artist's perception and expression of nature rather than the mechanical imitation of nature, pursuing not only the image reproduction of natural scenery, but also the capture of natural mood and atmosphere,

not only the present of reality, but also the pursuit of transcending reality. Therefore, literati painting often adopts the expression of writing, and expresses the essence of natural scenery through free and dashing ink and brushwork. Literati painters were good at using ink, water, color and other painting materials, using changing lines, ink colors and various techniques to express the charm of nature, and creating works with strong individual characteristics by emphasizing on reality and meaning. The way of expression makes literati painting more artistic and lyrical, showing a deep understanding of nature and emotional experience. In addition, literati paintings are often closely connected with poetry and literature, and painters often base their paintings on poetic sentiments. They expressed their feelings and understanding of the natural world through verses and translated these feelings into the composition and ink expression of their paintings. Landscape has a special symbolic meaning in Chinese culture, and many painters express their thoughts and feelings about nature and life through their representations of landscapes during their travels. They used brush and ink to outline natural scenery such as mountains, rivers, pines and cypresses, making landscape painting one of the most common themes in literati paintings.

2.2. Simple and unadorned

The plain and simple style of literati paintings reflects the traditional Chinese aesthetic concept of "peace and harmony". What the literati pursued in their paintings was not ostentatious and ornate images, but rather the expression of their inner feelings and their perception of nature through thoughtful composition and exquisite use of brush and ink. They believed that true beauty should be expressed as calm, introverted, and subtle, rather than dazzling and eye-catching. Under this aesthetic pursuit, the works of literati paintings often give people the artistic enjoyment of tranquility and comfort. The harmonization of ink and water in literati paintings is indispensable to the formation of the "plain and simple" style. Ink and water are the two basic elements in literati paintings, and painters use ink and water in varying degrees to complete the picture. Painters pay attention to the balance between ink and water, and use the right intensity to express the outlines and textures of the scenery, and this coordinated use of ink and water makes the picture look simple, but in fact, it is often rich in the artist's meaning and symbolism. Literati painters internalized emotions into the soul of their works, conveying thoughts on nature, life and philosophy through subtle brushwork and compositional arrangements. Such allegory and symbolism gave literati paintings more cultural value and artistic depth.

In *Sixteen Views of Southern Painting*, Zhu Liangzhi considers "the way of peace and harmony" to be the highest aesthetic ideal of Shen Zhou's paintings. In him, can reflect the late development of Chinese history in the scholars revered some of the spiritual temperament: affinity for the world, emphasizing the harmony between man and nature, in life to feel the beauty of the world. [2] *Farewell at the Capital* was painted in 1507, when Shen Zhou was in his later years, and the painting mainly expresses the emotional atmosphere of sending off his old friend Wu Kuan in his old age. The painting is very clean and simple, filled with tranquility, the overall layout of the picture is very empty, only the river is empty, the waves are flat and the sky is high, the trees are sparse and the sender is not far away from the goodbye. Shen

Zhou conveyed his reluctance to part with his old friend through simple ink and brushwork.

Literati paintings emphasize the sense of wholeness and are not obsessed with details. Often, the main features of the scene are outlined through simple ink and brushwork, and the details are left blank or blurred, so that the viewer can find and associate with the scene on his own, and this kind of creative method of not sticking to the details gives the viewer more space for imagination. The simplicity and plain style is a unique way of expression of traditional Chinese painting, which is not like Western oil painting, with its subtle and fine carving, but focuses on the aesthetic pursuit, the coordination of ink and water, allegory and symbolism, emotional internalization of humanistic concern and the meaning beyond the form. Literati painting's simple ink and profound connotation has high appreciation and research value, it is not only artistic expression, but also a kind of spiritual transmission.

2.3. Elegant and unconventional

Dashing and floating is also a unique artistic style of Chinese literati painting, which emphasizes the painter's individual expression, emotional release and unrestrained freedom of creation. This style is characterized by the painter's literary emotion, attitude towards life and aesthetic concept. Painters often integrate their own emotions into their paintings, and this emotional expression makes literati paintings full of vitality and emotional resonance. The dashing and elegant literati paintings emphasize the imagination of brush and ink techniques. Painters often use simple and expressive brush and ink to outline the main features of the scenery through techniques such as leaving white space, blurring, and light ink, creating a poetic and philosophical atmosphere. When appreciating the paintings, the viewer not only sees the scenery, but also feels the painter's deep understanding and emotional expression of nature and life.

The most common way of expression is "deep in the front and light at the back", where the foreground of the picture is drawn with deep ink, and the distant view of the picture, such as high mountains and flowing water, is blurred and sketched with light ink, which makes the picture rich in hierarchy and has a sense of haze and misty feeling. This makes the picture layered, hazy and ethereal. The flow, splash, and stain of ink are skillfully applied, and the painting is full of vitality.

3. The Main Subjects of Literati Paintings

3.1. Landscape painting

Landscape painting in literati painting is one of the important subjects in traditional Chinese painting, which takes landscape scenery as the main object of creation, and conveys the painter's thoughts and pursuits on nature, life and philosophy by depicting the changes of landscape in nature. In the history of Chinese painting, landscape painting has a long tradition and has played an important role in the development and inheritance of Chinese art.

First of all, landscape painting is characterized by its emphasis on expressing the magnificent beauty and grandeur of nature. In landscape painting, painters often use exquisite skills and unique compositional techniques to show the majesty and wonder of nature. The natural elements in the works, such as mountains, water and clouds, are given rich

imagery by the artists, so that the viewers can feel the mystery and grandeur of the landscape while enjoying it.

Secondly, through the depiction of landscape, landscape painting expresses the artist's aesthetic interest and pursuit of the beauty of nature. The landscapes in the works are often presented in a virtual and imaginative way, which not only shows the painter's unique understanding of nature, but also expresses the painter's profound thoughts on life and philosophy. For example, Huang Binhong's *Landscape with Colors* (Fig. 1), a Ming Dynasty painter and literati, uses staggered ink colors and a simple composition, with prominent main peaks and clusters of smaller peaks in the picture, and the brushwork is firm and thick, giving a sense of thickness and vastness. The rocks and trees are depicted by flying strokes, showing the power of ink and brushwork as well as the vividness of the landscape. The depiction of the flowing springs and streams leaves a euphemistic and twisting gap, and the flowing momentum of the gentle tumbling, presenting an ethereal and fascinating picture.

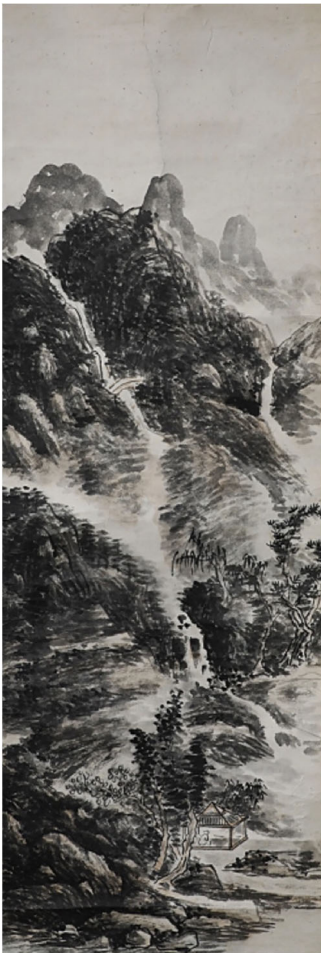


Figure 1. Landscape with Colors

Through the depiction of natural landscapes, landscape painting expresses the artist's respect and yearning for the survival and reproduction of all things in nature. The landscapes in the works are often characterized by distinctive regional features and cultural connotations, reflecting the interaction between regional culture and the natural environment. For example, in Song Dynasty painter Fan Kuan's "Traveling in the Streams and Mountains" (Figure 2), the artist portrays the landscape of southern China and the lifestyle of the literati in Jiangnan by delicately sketching out the details of the landscape, grasses, trees and buildings,

expressing his sentiments and praises for the native life and natural emotions.

As an important subject in literati painting, landscape painting conveys the painter's thoughts and pursuits of nature, life and philosophy through the depiction of natural landscapes. It focuses on expressing the magnificent beauty and grandeur of nature, emphasizing the painter's pursuit of the beauty of nature and his aesthetic interest in life, and at the same time, through its regional characteristics and cultural heritage, it expresses the sentiments and praises of native life and natural emotions. Landscape painting has an important position in the history of Chinese painting, which not only shapes the unique Chinese art style, but also becomes an important part of Chinese culture.



Figure 2. Traveling in the Streams and Mountains

3.2. Flower and Bird Paintings

Flower and bird painting in literati painting is another creative subject in traditional Chinese painting, which mainly takes flowers, birds, insects and other natural creatures as the objects of creation to show people's pursuit of natural beauty and love of life. Flower and bird painting has a long tradition in the history of Chinese painting and has played an important role in the development and inheritance of Chinese art.

Flower and bird painting has a unique position in literati painting, which conveys the literati sentiment and aesthetic pursuit of the painter's intermingling with nature with its special way of expression and unique artistic methods. Flower and bird painting in literati painting has a strong cultural atmosphere and humanistic spirit, often combined with the literati's cultivation and cultural cultivation, together shaping a unique Chinese artistic style.

First of all, flower and bird paintings show the beauty and vitality of nature with their exquisite skills and rich forms of expression. Works on this subject often present the gestures of flowers and the forms of birds through meticulous depictions, enabling the viewer to feel the marvelous variations of flowers and birds in form, color and texture. For example, the Ming dynasty painter Zhu Da's "hibiscus and geese" This painting consists of rocks, hibiscus and geese. The rocks and hibiscus are chapped and free of interest. The geese are looking up and looking back at the feathers, not much ink and brushwork, but full of aura, vividly showing the texture of the feathers.

Secondly, by observing and describing all things in nature, flower and bird paintings express the artist's deepest admiration and yearning for the beauty of nature. The flowers and birds in the works are often endowed with rich emotions and meanings by the painters, so that the viewers can feel the unique understanding and perception of the painters on the objects while appreciating them. For example, the Qing Dynasty painter Shen Quan's "Birds and Phoenix" conveys the ecological harmony of the natural world and the joy of life through the colorful feathers and gestures of the birds.

Literati paintings of birds and flowers with its unique literati charm and cultural meaning, highlighting the harmonious relationship between man and nature. Flower and bird paintings often combine flowers and birds in nature with humanistic feelings through ethereal and natural compositions and delicate artistic techniques to achieve a balanced and harmonious artistic effect. For example, Wen Zhengming's Ink and Bamboo Painting of the Ming Dynasty depicts delicate orchids as silk, presenting a quietness in the midst of agitation to express the literati's attitude of indifference to fame and fortune.

In a word, flower and bird painting in literati painting is an important subject in traditional Chinese painting, which takes flowers and birds in nature as the objects, and shows the painter's pursuit of the beauty of nature and his love for life through delicate depictions and unique artistic methods. In addition, flower and bird painting contains rich cultural connotation and humanistic spirit in its creation, which makes Chinese painting art shine uniquely on the world stage.

3.3. Character Paintings

Figure painting in literati painting mainly takes the literati as the theme, takes the posture, temperament and living condition of the literati as the object of creation, and expresses the sentiment, talent and cultural cultivation of the literati. This theme has a long tradition in the history of Chinese painting and has played an important role in promoting the inheritance and development of ancient Chinese culture.

The subjects of figure paintings in literati paintings are mainly literati, who are often characters with noble qualities and outstanding talents. Most of these literati came from the ranks of scholars, officials, and literati, etc. They had high aspirations and possessed talents, and were usually renowned for their talent and learning. The figures in literati paintings are characterized by literati temperament, such as elegance, naturalness, innocence, aloofness and introspection.

The subjects of figures in literati paintings express the state of life and spirituality of the literati. The Luoshen Fu Figure, made by the famous painter Gu Kaizhi of the Eastern Jin Dynasty, is 27.1 centimeters in length and 572.8 centimeters in width, and is a long scroll consisting of several storylines similar to a comic strip but integrated, but the original scroll is now lost. The Luoshen Fu painting is the first long scroll in traditional Chinese painting, and is regarded as the "originator of Chinese painting". The main surviving works are four copies from the Song Dynasty, which are housed in the Palace Museum in Beijing (two), the Liaoning Provincial Museum, and the Freer Gallery of Art in the United States. In ancient Chinese figure painting, the depiction of the figure is not only satisfied with the resemblance of appearance, but also focuses on the revelation of the character and inner world of the figure, which is known as transmitting the spirit. The unique tradition of ancient Chinese figure painting is also manifested in its ability to utilize the form of long scrolls to break through the

limitations of time and space, depicting real-life scenes and the activities of its characters in a realistic and detailed manner. The Night Banquet of Han Xizai was made by Gu Hongzhong, a painter of the Southern Tang Dynasty in the Five Dynasties, and is now the only surviving work of Gu Hongzhong. The existing Song copy, 28.7 centimeters wide and 335.5 centimeters long, is now in the Palace Museum in Beijing. The painting depicts a night banquet at the home of Han Xizai, an official, with songs and music. The painting depicts a complete night banquet at Han's house, i.e., five scenes of pipa playing, watching a dance, resting between feasts, blowing, and sending off guests. The author's amazing power of observation and deep understanding of the fate and thoughts of the main character have created a wonderful work that deserves to be remembered forever.

In addition to expressing the spiritual connotation and temperament of the literati, figure paintings in literati paintings also reflect the background of the times and the society. For example, the Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains by Huang Gongwang, a painter of the Yuan Dynasty, features the literati's self-satisfied manor life among the mountains and waters, demonstrating their escapism and transcendental state of mind. The figures in literati paintings are often combined with other themes, such as interplaying with elements of landscape, birds and flowers, and figures to form a richer and more flavorful picture.

Generally speaking, the figures in literati paintings take the literati as their subject matter, and through depicting their postures, temperament and living conditions, they show the literati's sentiments, talents and cultural cultivation. This subject matter enriched the cultural connotation of Chinese painting history and also provided rich artistic resources for the creation of paintings in later generations.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, the origin, main stylistic features and creative themes of literati painting are analyzed in depth. Through the study of the unique art form of literati painting, we can see the unique status and importance of literati painting in traditional Chinese painting.

First of all, in terms of the origin of literati painting, we find that it originated from the elegant hobbies of the ancient literati and scholars. Under the influence of Confucianism, these literati pursued the "gentleman's style" and had a unique pursuit of art and aesthetic standards. They combined natural scenery with their personal feelings and expressed their inner and outer communication and resonance through ink and brush. This unique way of expressing art through personal emotions became one of the main characteristics of literati painting.

Secondly, in terms of the stylistic characteristics of literati painting, we find that literati painting pursues the expression of mood rather than realistic depiction. Literati painting emphasizes "conveying feelings with meaning" and focuses on the use of brush and ink and the wholeness of form. Through subtle expression, literati paintings do not stick to details, but convey the mystery and beauty of the natural world and the deep emotions of human hearts through imaginative techniques and artistic conception.

Finally, in terms of the creative themes of literati paintings, we find that the creative themes of literati paintings are wide and deep. Literati paintings not only take natural scenery such as landscapes, flowers, birds and animals as the objects of creation, but also involve social scenes such as elegance,

figures, banquets, and even expand into various fields such as traditional culture and historical allusions. Through the diversified choices of artistic themes, literati painting demonstrated the extensive knowledge and depth of thought of the Chinese literati, and provided works of artistic value and cultural connotation for future generations.

To summarize, as a unique form of traditional Chinese painting, literati painting has its distinctive features and far-reaching influence compared with other genres. By combining with nature, personal feelings and social environment, literati painting expresses a unique artistic style and unique aesthetic concepts. At the same time, literati painting also embodies the extensive knowledge and noble sentiments of Chinese literati, and carries rich historical and cultural connotations. It is believed that through the active research and inheritance of literati painting, we will be able to continuously promote the development and innovation of Chinese painting and contribute more wonderful works and ideas to the world art world.

Acknowledgment

This work was supported in part by a grant from Graduate research innovation fund project of Anhui University of Finance and Economic “Study on Zhu Liangzhi's aesthetic thought of painting” (ACYC2022309).

References

- [1] Li Jun. From “Rice Point Landscape” “Ink play” on the literati painting “Jixing travel heart” interest [J]. *The contending of literature and art*, 2011(08):79-81.
- [2] Zhu Liangzhi. *The sixteen views of southern painting* [M]. Beijing: Peking University Press. 2013. 136 - 140.
- [3] Geng tiehua. Reading Dr. Shi Jing's “The wind of time and the wind of art” [J]. *Journal of Tonghua Normal University*, 2014, 35(07):139-144. DOI:10.13877/j.cnki.cn22-1284.2014.07.004.