
The Role of the Handling of the Real and the Illusory in Ink and Brush in Ink-wash Figure Painting in Expressing the Characters' Expressions

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Abstract: In traditional Chinese painting, ink-wash figure painting is an important branch. Its unique brush and ink language plays an irreplaceable role in shaping character images and conveying inner emotions. This article explores the influence of the handling of brush and ink reality and illusion in ink-wash figure painting on the expression of character expressions. Based on the analysis of classic traditional ink-wash figure paintings, this paper studies the application of brush and ink techniques such as the combination of reality and illusion, and the interplay of density and sparseness in shaping figure images and expressing figure expressions. The results show that the appropriate handling of reality and illusion can enhance the sense of space and layering in the picture and highlight the characteristics of figure expressions. The brush and ink technique of the interplay of reality and illusion can create a rich artistic conception to convey the inner emotions of the figure. The treatment technique of combining the real and the illusory can highlight the key points and thereby highlight the personality traits of the characters. This article also discusses the innovative application of the handling of the real and the illusory in ink and brush in modern ink-wash figure painting creation and the pursuit of balance between tradition and modernity. Research shows that the rational application of brush and ink, as well as the techniques of handling the real and the illusory, can effectively enhance the artistic expressiveness of ink-wash figure painting and provide an important means for artists to create vivid and lively figures.

Keywords: Ink Figure painting; The clarity and thinness of brush and ink; Expression of demeanor; Artistic innovation; Traditional techniques

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1. Introduction

In traditional Chinese painting, ink-wash figure painting is an important branch, which has profound cultural background and artistic value. In this field, brush and ink are not only the core forms of expression but also carry emotions and artistic conceptions. In recent years, the global attention to traditional Chinese culture has been continuously increasing, which has greatly enhanced the market value and academic research enthusiasm of ink art. Statistics show that the number of research papers on traditional ink art at home and abroad has increased by nearly 40% from 2018 to 2023, and ink figure painting has become one of the hotspots due to its unique artistic language and cultural connotation^[1]. Ink-wash figure painting demonstrates the artist's profound insight into the expressions and inner emotions of the figures through the treatment of brush and ink, as well as the interplay of reality and illusion. This technique not only embodies the traditional Chinese

philosophical aesthetic concept of “the interplay of reality and illusion”, but also provides rich inspiration for modern artistic creation. Against such a backdrop, exploring the role of the handling of the real and the illusory in brushwork and ink in expressing the characters’ expressions is not only an in-depth exploration of traditional techniques but also an active exploration of contemporary artistic innovation^[2].

Classic works of traditional ink-wash figure painting widely employ techniques such as the combination of the real and the illusory, and the interplay of density and sparseness to shape figures and convey inner emotions. For instance, Liang Kai’s “Ink-splashed Immortal” of the Song Dynasty boldly uses the contrast between the real and the illusory to express the immortal’s transcendent demeanor. In contrast, Chen Hongshou of the Ming and Qing Dynasties was able to depict the complex psychological activities of characters merely through the delicate changes in brush and ink. These works not only demonstrate the significance of the handling of brush and ink, the interplay of reality and illusion, in artistic expression, but also provide precious references for later artists^[3]. Since modern times, with the development of artistic concepts towards diversification, the creative techniques of ink figure painting have shown new trends. Many artists, while inheriting traditional techniques, also attempt to integrate the expression forms of Western art to explore new possibilities of brush and ink, as well as the interplay of reality and illusion, in the current environment. However, in this process, how to balance the relationship between tradition and modernity and how to better present the expressions of characters through the handling of brush and ink, as well as the application of reality and illusion, remain urgent problems to be solved. Therefore, this article aims to reveal the crucial importance of the handling of brush and ink, as well as reality and illusion, in the expression of characters’ expressions by analyzing classic works and exploring modern creative practices, thereby providing theoretical support for future artistic innovation^[4].

2. The techniques of brush and ink virtuality and reality in ink-wash figure painting

2.1. The Historical Evolution of the illusory and Real Brushstrokes

In traditional Chinese painting, ink-wash figure painting is an important part. The techniques of brush and ink, as well as the combination of reality and illusion, have undergone a long historical evolution before they were formed and developed. During the Tang Dynasty, painters attached great importance to the variations in the density of lines and the spatial rhythm of the picture to present the expressions and emotions of the figures. By the Song Dynasty, the techniques of ink and brush, as well as the combination of the real and the illusory, had matured. After the rise of literati painting, painters placed more emphasis on “expressing the spirit through form”, using the combination of the real and the illusory to create a beautiful artistic conception in the picture. Since the Yuan Dynasty, landscape painting has delved deeply into the relationship between the real and the illusory, and figure painting has gradually absorbed these experiences, thus forming more delicate expression techniques^[5]. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the technique of using solid and void brushstrokes further developed. It not only emphasized the smoothness of lines but also paid attention to the lightness, heaviness, and speed of the brushstrokes, making the picture more layered and dynamic. In modern times, with the deepening of artistic exchanges between the East and the West, ink-wash figure painting has integrated more modern elements while inheriting traditional techniques, making the handling of solid and void brushstrokes more diverse and rich. Data from the Chinese National Academy of Arts shows that the number of ink figure painting exhibitions has increased by approximately 8% on average each year in the past five years. Among them, the proportion of innovative works using the technique of virtual and real exceeds 40%. This trend indicates that the technique of virtual and real brushwork is not only a continuation of tradition but also an important means of modern artistic expression^[6].

2.2. Types and Characteristics of the Illusory and Real Ink Technique

In ink-wash figure painting, the technique of using ink with real and illusory elements is a key means to depict the expressions of figures. It is diverse and distinctive. According to the variations in ink density, dryness and wetness, the technique of using ink with real and illusory elements can be classified into a contrast type where thick ink is solid and

light ink is illusory, and a complementary type where dry brush flying white is illusory and wet brush smudging is solid^[7]. The main Outlines of the characters and key parts such as facial features and hand movements are mostly depicted with thick ink to highlight the facial characteristics, while light ink is often used to render the background or secondary parts to create a hazy atmosphere and enhance the spatial sense of the picture. Dry brush white ink has a unique texture effect that can reflect the texture of clothing or the ethereal feeling of the environment, while wet brush shading is good at creating changes in light and shadow, making the character image more three-dimensional and vivid^[8]. The technique of ink application of real and void is also reflected in the layout of ink density and sparseness. The dense areas are handled with care and strictness, while the sparse areas are left blank for ventilation. The alternating treatment of density and sparseness makes the visual impact of the picture strong and harmonious. In recent years, with the development of digital technology, some artists have attempted to combine traditional ink and ink techniques with digital painting to add new vitality to ink figure painting. According to statistics from the China Artists Association, the proportion of innovative application of ink and ink techniques in ink painting creation across the country reached 35% in 2022, which shows its significant position in contemporary art practice^[9].

2.3. Artistic Effect of the combination of reality and illusion

In ink-wash figure painting, the technique of combining the real and the illusory in brush and ink has a very obvious artistic effect and is particularly important in shaping the characters' expressions. This is because the method of interweaving the real and the illusory enables the picture to not only display the external form of the characters but also convey their inner emotions, achieving the artistic pursuit of both form and spirit^[10]. For instance, when drawing a person's eyes, using a solid brush to outline the eyelid contour and a dashed brush to blur the light and shadow in the pupil can precisely capture the person's emotional fluctuations. When dealing with clothing lines, the interplay of solid and dashed lines can express the fluidity of the clothing and hint at the person's posture and personality. Moreover, the combination of reality and illusion can significantly enhance the layering and spatial sense of the picture. The sharp contrast between a solid foreground and a virtual background can draw the viewer's attention to the core content of the picture^[11]. In recent years, with the infiltration of modern art concepts, many painters have boldly experimented with new materials and forms on the basis of inheriting traditional techniques of illusion and reality, thus giving ink figure painting a diversified style and appearance. The National Cultural Big Data Platform shows that in the exhibitions related to ink figure painting from 2021 to 2023, the proportion of works using the technique of combining reality and illusion reached as high as 60%, which is sufficient to demonstrate that this technique is widely applied and has a profound influence in contemporary art creation.

3. The influence of the lightness and thinness of brush and ink on the expression of characters' expressions

3.1. Create a sense of space for shaping character images

In ink-wash figure painting, the ingenious combination of brush and ink, as well as the interplay of reality and illusion, can endow the picture with a unique sense of space. In traditional ink-wash art, the handling of reality and illusion is not only reflected in the variation of ink color density, but more importantly, in the construction of picture layers through blank space and the density of lines. Data analysis over the past five years shows that over 60% of contemporary ink-wash figure paintings employ the technique of contrast between the real and the illusory when expressing a sense of space^[12], and the relationship between the figure and the background is particularly prominent. For instance, when depicting a person's face, solid strokes are often used to outline the facial features, while virtual strokes are employed to render the light and shadow effects, thus creating a sense of three-dimensionality and depth. This technique can make the characters more vivid and lively, and provide viewers with a visual experience beyond the plane. By combining the real and the illusory, artists can extend the limited picture into an infinite space for imagination, thereby enhancing the artistic appeal of the work.

3.2. Enhance the expressiveness of characters' emotions

The enhancement of a character's emotional expressiveness cannot be achieved without the application of ink and brush, as well as the combination of reality and illusion. In the creation of ink-wash figure paintings, emotional expression often relies on the variations in ink density and the lightness, heaviness, and speed of brushstrokes. The technique of blending reality and illusion can endow the picture with subtle emotional layers and has an advantage in expressing complex emotions. Recent research shows that approximately 70% of ink-wash figure painting creators use the contrast between reality and illusion to strengthen the inner world of the characters. For instance^[13], when depicting sad or contemplative figures, artists often blur the ink to create an atmosphere and use fine and solid brushstrokes to capture the subtle changes in the eyes and corners of the mouth to convey profound emotional connotations. This not only brings the viewer closer to the painting but also makes the figure more infectious. By precisely grasping the technique of blurring and blurring, artists can push the expression of the figure's emotions to the extreme and thus evoke resonance in the viewer.

3.3. Enhance the artistic tension of the picture

The rational application of brush and ink, as well as the combination of reality and illusion, can significantly enhance the artistic tension of ink-wash figure painting. In the context of the integration of tradition and modernity, this technique has gained new insights. Market research data from the past five years shows that ink-wash figure paintings that combine the real and the virtual have received more attention at domestic and international art exhibitions and have a transaction rate approximately 35% higher than other types^[14]. This is because there are unique aspects to the handling of the real and the virtual in the picture. Firstly, the transition of ink color intensity can create a strong visual impact. Secondly, the contrast between the real and the virtual can create dramatic contradictions and harmony. For instance, in dynamic scene representation, when the background is blurred while the main subject of the figure is clear, the two complement each other, highlighting the theme and enriching the rhythm of the picture. Moreover, the combination of reality and illusion can break through the limitations of traditional composition, thus making the picture full of tension and vitality. Therefore, this technique not only enhances the artistic value of the work but also adds many modern elements to ink figure painting^[15].

4. Conclusion

In traditional Chinese painting, ink-wash figure painting is an important branch and holds a significant position in the contemporary art field. Industry data from the past five years indicates that the transaction volume of the Chinese calligraphy and painting market has continued to grow. Ink-wash figure painting is very popular in the collecting circle due to its profound cultural background and unique artistic expressiveness. Research shows that the treatment of the real and the illusory in brush and ink plays a significant role in shaping characters' expressions. It is the core of traditional techniques and an indispensable artistic language in some modern creations. By analyzing classic works and modern innovative practices, it can be seen that the technique of combining the real and the illusory can greatly enhance the spatial sense and layering of the picture, making the characters' images more three-dimensional and vivid. Just as the use of variations in ink density and the contrast in line density can precisely grasp the subtle expressions of characters and convey rich emotional connotations, this technique not only enhances the artistic value of the work but also enables viewers to have a deeper aesthetic experience^[16].

Against the backdrop of the integration of tradition and modernity, the expressive boundaries of ink-wash figure painting have been further expanded due to the innovative application of the treatment of the real and the illusory in brush and ink. In recent years, many artists have attempted to combine the light and shadow effects in Western painting with traditional brush and ink techniques, thus creating works that have both an Oriental flavor and a sense of The Times. Such exploration not only enables the vitality of traditional culture to continue, It has also brought new vitality to ink-wash figure painting. However, how to maintain innovation when inheriting and how to not lose the fundamentals when breaking through remain important issues that artists have to face. Research shows that to achieve the maximization of

artistic expressiveness, it is necessary to deeply understand traditional techniques and meet modern aesthetic demands. The reasonable use of brush and ink, as well as the handling techniques of reality and void, can not only highlight the personality traits of the characters. Moreover, it can create a profound artistic conception, making the work more appealing. This research achievement provides theoretical support for the future development of ink figure painting and points out the direction for artistic practice in related fields.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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