



Study on the Style Features and Aesthetic Value of Dong Qichang's Landscape Paintings

Lipeng Wang

School of Fine Arts and Design, Xingtai University, Xingtai, Hebei, China

Abstract: It is worth noting that in this article, we focus on the landscape paintings of Dong Qichang, an important painter from the Ming period, through his painting historical development and by tracing back to his painting inspiration for the Song and Yuan periods. Then we systematically discuss the features of Dong Qichang painting style, including the calligraphy stroke, the plot selection and the application of color. It also clarifies the deep value for the visual aesthetics in Dong Qichang's landscape paintings including his "literati elegance", poetry-calligraphy-painting unification, and impacts of the development of Chinese landscape paintings.

Keywords: Dong Qichang, landscape paintings, style features, aesthetic value

1. Introduction

Dong Qichang(1555-1636), a famous artist in the Ming Dynasty as a painter, calligrapher and art theorist occupies an important position in the Chinese art history. His landscape paintings not only embodied the climax of landscape art of the Ming Dynasty, but also have an tremendous impact on the further development of Chinese landscape painting. Dong Qichang developed his style of painting by synthesizing the aesthetic features of many Song and Yuan paintings and became a painting artist who appeared refined, delicate and rich in Chinese spirit.

2. Historical Context and Artistic Inheritance

2.1 The Artistic Environment in the Ming Dynasty

During the Ming Dynasty, as though the Qing Palace set up Imperial Painting School, but the function was a little declining compared with that in the Song Dynasty. Literati painting became the mainstream of art scene. The literati with their deep cultural quality and special artistic tastes valued personal sentiments and spiritual pursuits in painting. They treated painting as self-cultivation and self-expression instead of realistic expression.

This age is also the age when the art market is formed. With the emergence of the merchant class, there are more requirements in artwork consumption, which gives economy support for the construction of art. Meanwhile, the printing technology spreads out and fosters the publicity of

art theory and masterpieces, which make the artists have more chances to learn from the experience of predecessors. This atmosphere brings a suitable condition for the nurture of Dong Qichang's art.[1]

2.2 Influence from the Song and Yuan Dynasties

The landscape paintings of Song and Yuan dynasties had a great influence on Dong Qichang. In Song Dynasty, the landscape paintings had high level of realism. For example, Fan Kuan and Guo Xi could draw the magnificent and extensive natural scenery with exquisite brushes and precise perspective, their painting work stresses "spirit like of the nature", influencing Dong Qichang to pursue the spirit of landscape painting by natural scenery.

During Yuan dynasty, landscape painting took a great turning point, and literati painting dominated the landscape painting art circle, the characteristics being to express their emotions and spiritual world with light and refined brush strokes, meanwhile connecting painting with calligraphy, stressing the rhythm of brushstroke and the expressiveness of lines. Dong Qichang revered Yuan -Dynasty literati painters very much.He was attracted to their brushand-ink techniques and aesthetic thought, and integrated their achievements into his own works, developing his artistic language style with the reality of Song Dynasty's and the beauty of Yuan Dynasty's.

3. Style Features of Dong Qichang's Landscape Paintings

3.1 Brushwork Characteristics

Another characteristic of Dong Qichang's landscape painting is his exceptional brushwork style. He introduced calligraphy brushstroke in painting, then brushstroke has become rhythmic and aesthetic. His stroke is graceful, flowing and light, and it seems tough enough to have some degree of softness, for instance, in his painting the Autumn Colors on the Qiao and Hua Mountains, brushstroke in painting is used to represent mountains, which is quick and delicate to show the shape and texture of the mountain.[2] The lines never strictly emulate the contour of the mountains but as far as the spirit and dynamism of mountains being expressed through a rhythm of the brush are concerned, all are serving the purpose.

Dong Qichang also took serious consideration to the "ink rhyme" in his paintings. He created various effects of ink with skillfully managing the ink and the water, like dry ink, wet ink, thick ink, and thin ink, and combined these various effects to generate a myriad ink sense picture. He has employed dry ink to sketch rock texture giving them a rough and ancient feeling, and wet ink to render clouds and mist to make it hazy and mystical, with a distinctive aesthetic sensation.

3.2 Composition Style

According to the analysis of composition, Dong Qichang tended to adopt free and unconstrained, and he was not as fixed as the traditional rules of composition but paid attention to the general balance and coordination of the picture. Dong Qichang's landscape paintings usually have a broader and open space, and have mountains, rivers, trees, buildings layout, full of the sense of space and space[3].

For example, in most of his vertical-scroll landscape painting, he would set a majestic mountain range at the top of the picture, water flow at the bottom and a scattered house. Such composition not only demonstrate the grandeur of nature, but also makes people feel the peace and relaxation. And he liked using "blank space" ingeniously in his painting as well. The blank is not dead, on the contrary it gives the picture a more space for imagination, making the overall picture more lively and soulful. The solid body (the painted landscape) plus the blank gives a different visual rhythm, which is his profound reflection of the relationship between "there is" and "non-there is" in the classical Chinese aesthetics.

3.3 Color Application

The color application of landscape paintings of Dong Qichang also has his own features. He didn't pursue the bright and gorgeous colors, but adopted simple and elegant color tone. He often use light ink and light colors to render a new and delicate atmosphere. Take his color landscape paintings as examples. He will use pale green to portray the mountains, light yellow to show the autumn leaves and light blue to represent the sky and water. These mild light colors are laid on the ink-wash base, making a harmonized and unifying colors system.

4. Aesthetic Value of Dong Qichang's Landscape Paintings

4.1 Pursuit of "Literati Elegance"

Dong Qichang's landscape paintings embody the unique aesthetic concept of "literati elegance." As a literati painter, he regarded painting as a way to express his noble character and refined taste.[4] His paintings are full of cultural connotations and spiritual temperament, far beyond the simple level of visual beauty.

His love to nature, yearning for a quiet and free life in his works. The calm mountain, flowing stream, quiet hut in his paintings not only depict the natural beauty of landscape but also reflect the image of inner mental world, his elegant and quiet brush and compositional mode of painting and colouring, the aim of which is to give the viewer an artistic conception of calmness, enable the viewer to be purified spiritually and obtain pleasure spiritually. This inclination to "cultured beauty" has a deep effect on Chinese landscape painting's taste aesthetics, urging generations of successors into being more serious about depiction of subjective feelings and literary meanings while painting.

4.2 Integration of Poetry, Calligraphy, and Painting

Dong Qichang was good at poetry, calligraphy and painting, and he could combine the three arts in his Landscape painting, often inscribe poetry on the picture, which not only enriched the painting content, but also increased the artistic conception. The poems he inscribed were either his self-created or excerpted from classic works, but they were closely connected with the thought and sentiment of the picture.

4.3 Influence on the Development of Chinese Landscape Painting

Dong Qichang's landscape paintings and art theories have a far-reaching influence on the development of Chinese landscape painting. His concept of "orthodox school" in painting theory, which emphasizes learning from the classic works

of the Song and Yuan dynasties, has guided the creation and development of Chinese landscape painting for a long time. [5] Many painters in the Qing Dynasty and later generations followed his artistic path, learning from his style features and aesthetic concepts.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, Dong Qichang's landscape paintings with distinctive features and great aesthetic value have a status in Chinese art history, their brushwork, composition and colour application form Dong's special artistic style which combines merits from Song Dynasty and Yuan Dynasty and has the aesthetic nature of the Ming Dynasty. His efforts for "the scholar's style", calligraphy-poetry-painting combination and contributions towards the growth of Chinese landscape painting reflected his remarkable accomplishments in art.

References

- [1] James Cahill. *Parting at the Shore: Chinese Painting of the Early and Middle Ming Dynasty*. SDX Joint Publishing Company, 2019.
- [2] Shan Guolin. *History of Chinese Art — Ming Dynasty Volume*. Shandong Fine Arts Publishing House, 2020.
- [3] Xu Bangda. *A Record of Ancient Calligraphy and Painting Seen: Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties Painting*. Hunan Fine Arts Publishing House, 2013.
- [4] Chen Chuanxi. *History of Chinese Landscape Painting*. Tianjin People's Fine Arts Publishing House, 2011.
- [5] Hong Zaixin. *History of Chinese Art*. China Academy of Art Press, 2004.

Author Bio

Lipeng Wang (1987.08—), male, Han ethnicity, from Xingtai, Hebei Province. He is a lecturer at the School of Fine Arts and Design of Xingtai University, with a master's degree. His research direction is art education.