

Analyzing the Essential Inheritance Elements of Chinese Painting Strokes—A Study on Eighteen Strokes

Xue Hu

School of Art, Anhui University of Finance & Economics, Benbu City, Anhui Province, China, 233030

Abstract: *As the most basic and most important Eighteen Strokes in Chinese painting strokes, it has formed a distinctive part of Chinese brushstrokes after the efforts of dynasty painters. Its unique painting language has high inheritance value. This paper takes the highly representative Eighteen Strokes as an example, then uses Xie He's Six Canons as a theoretical framework to analyze the inheritance factors of the Eighteen Strokes, deriving what factors need to be clear and explicit in the inheritance of Chinese painting. This paper analyses the inheritance factors of Eighteen Strokes, which aims to inherit Eighteen Strokes better and provide a more concrete research path for Eighteen Strokes.*

Keywords: *Chinese Painting Stroke, Eighteen Strokes, Essential Factors, the Six Canons of Xie He*

1. Introduction

In traditional Chinese painting, strokes only served as the primary modeling function at the beginning^[1]. However, with the continuous development of the times, the exploration and breakthrough of painters in the past dynasties, from the initial primary tool that stroke gradually endowed with more profound emotion and more vivid artistic conception, stroke has become the primary carrier for painters to express their ideas. That is the unique spiritual inheritance of Chinese painting and an essential link between traditional and contemporary cultures.^{[1][2]}

Eighteen Strokes is one of the most representative of Chinese painting and originally refers to the different ways of expressing the folds of clothes in figure painting; it is a general term for the stroke method drawn by later generations of figure painters after long-term observation, practice, breakthrough, and summary.^[3] Each type of stroke is given a corresponding name vividly, which makes it easy to distinguish, remember, and explain the characteristics of each type of stroke. Eighteen Strokes include Gao Gu You Si Stroke, Qin Xian Stroke, Tie Xian Stroke, Xing Yun Liu Shui Stroke, Ma Huang Stroke, Ding Tou Shu Wei Stroke, Hun Stroke, Jue Tou Stroke, Cao Yi Stroke, Zhe Lu Stroke, Gan Lan Stroke, Zao He Stroke, Liu Ye Stroke, Zhu Ye Stroke, Zhan Bi Shui Wen Stroke, Jian Bi Stroke, Ku Chai Stroke, Qiu Yin Stroke.^[4]

The Six Canons, also called the Six Canons of Xie He, was summarized and put forward by the Southern Qi Dynasty painter and painting critic Xie He in his book *The Record of the Classification of Painters*.^{[5][11]} Since Xie He proposed the Six Canons, through the extensive use and elucidation of generations of artists and art critics, Six Canons has developed into an essential category of Chinese aesthetics. The complementarity of the Six Canons constitutes a complete program and system of Chinese painting. The analysis and exploration of the Six Canons are of great significance for understanding the spirit, theory, and aesthetics of Chinese painting.^[5]

2. Method

This paper first analyzes the importance of Eighteen Strokes in Chinese painting, highlighting its essential historical status and aesthetic value. Then, taking the Six Canons as the theoretical framework, analyze the factors of Eighteen Strokes in the inheritance and clear the inheritance element of Eighteen Strokes.

3. Analyze

3.1. Analyzes the Importance of Eighteen Strokes

Stroke is the lifeline of Chinese painting, and its aesthetic value in Oriental art is also an important point different from the line modeling used in Western painting.^{[1][2]} The stroke provides an artistic medium for artists to express their aesthetics and emotions and a richer art form for their creation. By studying the artistic language of stroke, we have a deeper understanding of the history, background, and humanistic feelings of Chinese painting.^{[3][4][7]} With the development of stroke, the stroke of Chinese painting will continue to inherit the traditional spiritual connotation of Chinese painting and the artistic spirit of the Chinese nation. Because of this, the art of stroke has always been irreplaceable in traditional Chinese painting's core position. Throughout the development of traditional Chinese painting from ancient times to the present, after thousands of years of evolution and precipitation, a unique language expression method has been formed, using strokes to shape objects, create artistic conceptions, and express emotions. Therefore, the formal beauty and spiritual connotation of stroke further confirm the critical position of stroke in Chinese painting.^{[8][1]}

Eighteen Strokes constitute the core part of the Chinese painting brush and ink system, the most unique artistic language of Chinese painting,^[2] and Eighteen Strokes is the most essential and representative artistic language that constitutes Chinese painting. Since the concept of Eighteen Strokes was proposed in the late Ming Dynasty, Eighteen Strokes' painting manuals, formulas, and other painting teaching books have been widely adopted and quoted. The influence of Eighteen Strokes' painting method on later generations not only exists in art theory but also needs to be based on the teaching and creation of Chinese painting now, and it also has a significant impact on the way of thinking in Chinese painting. The Eighteen Strokes, created by ancient painters, is the source of stroke in Chinese painting; its fundamental purpose is to shape the image of objects and convey the beauty of things.^{[3][4]}



Figure 1. *Admonitions Scroll (partial)*, Gu Kaizhi, Jin Dynasty, 39x1197cm

The use of stroke modeling in Chinese painting has a long history. For example, the earliest Chinese scroll painting we can see now is the *Admonitions Scroll* (as shown in Figure 1) by the Eastern Jin Dynasty painter Gu Kaizhi (about 348-409), and he used the first Gao Gu You Si Stroke in Eighteen Strokes. Another example is Li Gonglin (1049-1105), a painter of the Northern Song Dynasty. He is the representative painter of the Xing Yun Liu Shui Strokes (as shown in Figure 2), which are based on the flexible brushwork and artistic conception of Gao Gu You Si Stroke, combined with the brushstroke of the painter Wu Daozi so that the stroke method has been further developed. In addition, Liang Kai, a painter in the Southern Song Dynasty, learned Li Gonglin's stroke method. On this basis, he created Jian Bi Stroke, which further developed the stroke method. Jian Bi Stroke only uses simple, rough brushstrokes coupled with flexible ink and can outline the mental outlook of the characters with just a few strokes. Jian Bi Stroke absorbs the brushwork of calligraphy cursive, which is concise but

meaningful. The new style created by the painter Liang Kai was of pioneering significance. After that, the brushwork of many painters, including the Yuan Dynasty painter Yan Hui, originated from Liang Kai, showing its far-reaching influence.^[6]

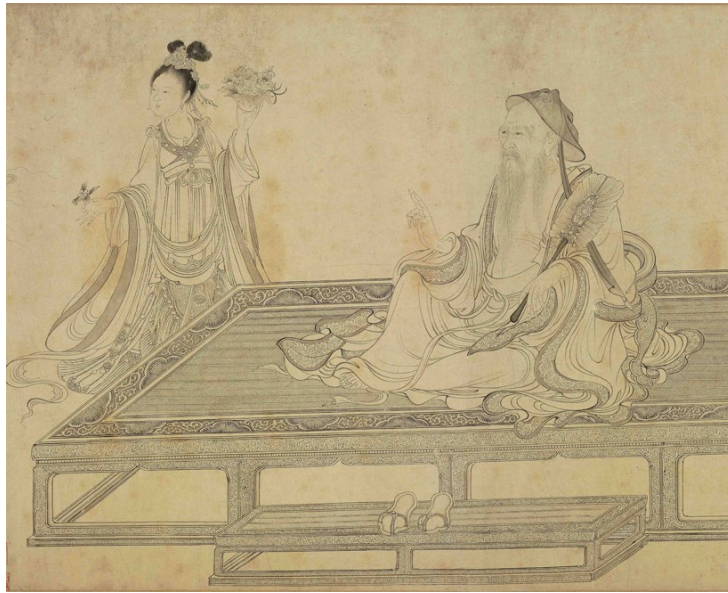


Figure 2. *Vimo performance and Teaching (partial)*, Painter Li Gonglin, 34.6 x 207.5 cm

It can be seen that Eighteen Strokes is the essence of history and culture preserved in inheritance and development, and it is an excellent result of the joint efforts, summary, and innovation of many painters in the past. When the stroke is recognized, used, and promoted, then this stroke is the embodiment of people's aesthetics and value orientation in this era, reflecting the aesthetic taste and social life background of this era. To study the process of the emergence, development, and change of Eighteen Strokes is to learn about the experience and social life of Chinese painting, witness the aesthetic differences of Chinese paintings through the study of Eighteen Strokes, and inherit the spirit of Chinese painting through Eighteen Strokes.^{[9][10]}

3.2. Analyze the Inheritance Factors of Eighteen Strokes with The Six Canons

The Six Canons, as the program of Chinese painting creation and critical aesthetic principles, proposes a complete painting theoretical system framework. Taking the Six Canons as the theory framework for analyzing Eighteen Strokes, it can be obtained by the factor that Eighteen Stroke needs to pay attention to in the inheritance.

Among the Six Canons, the First Canon is the most important, formally summarizing the performance characteristics of the following other canons. The First Canon contains the philosophical thoughts of the ancient Chinese, emphasizing the artistic conception in the painting and emphasizing the integration of human and natural life. Vividness in The First Canon refers to expressing the object vividly to the maximum extent, making the work have artistic appeal, and at the same time integrating one's emotions into the painting, striving for a more profound spiritual expression.^{[5][12]} The First Canon is inseparable from the cultural accomplishment of the creator and has extremely high requirements on the connotation of the creator himself. The artistic conception pursued is to enhance the aesthetic level and emotional expression of creative works.^{[5][11][12]} Therefore, The First Canon is summarized as Vivid Artwork, the core content of the Six Canons of painting. For Eighteen Strokes, inheriting Eighteen Strokes is for better creation and innovation of artists who need to inherit the painting creation spirit of the First Canon. Eighteen Strokes is the essence of traditional Chinese painting and is the most unique artistic language of Chinese painting.^[1]

The Second Canon originally referred to using the brush to express the volume and shape of the object. Chinese painting uses the brush to shape an object form. How to use the brush to portray the object and express things is a vital part of Chinese painting. Even the Second Canon can be summarized as the performance carrier of other Canons, and the Second Canon uses a different method to express the different textures and characteristics of the object.^{[5][11]} The Second Canon for Eighteen Strokes requires how to use the brush of each stroke, explaining the method of using the brush for each stroke in detail,

clearly, and concisely. However, it is not difficult to find out by consulting materials, painting books, history books, etc., that some stroke explanations are incomplete, missing, or even blank; for example, in the book of *Painting Mentoring*, just one word of Qin Xian Stroke: this stroke often was used by painters Zhou Fang and Qian Shunju. It only mentioned which painters used Qin Xian Stroke but did not mention the specific method of using the brush. Another example is in the book *Chinese Painting Tasting Catalog*, the explanation of Xing Yun Liu Shui Stroke is blank. [4][11]

The Third Canon originally referred to the observation method of the image. The Third Canon emphasis should first have a profound observation and understanding of objective things and then fully express the image characteristics of things; that is, while accurately stroking the object's shape, it should subjectively refine its features and trade-offs. [11] When artists create art based on the essential characteristics of the object they express, they incorporate their emotions and feelings into a comprehensive expression that combines objective and subjective. [12] The Third Canon to Eighteen Strokes requires observing each stroke's characteristics. When inheriting Eighteen Strokes, summarize the characteristics of each stroke. However, some strokes of Eighteen Strokes do not clearly describe the characteristics of the description. For example, the book *Painting Tips* explains Cao Yi Stroke in this: Using this stroke to draw paintings is like a tulle on the body, like just emerging from the water. Such an explanation does not clearly explain the characteristics of stroke. [11][12]

The Fourth Canon originally referred to coloring according to what is expressed. Due to the different types of things to be drawn, their color characteristics are also other, and the methods of expression are also different. However, to achieve the vivid artwork purpose, the artist must also fully play his subjective initiative instead of unthinkingly copying or copying the object's original color. [7][11] The Fourth Canon to Eighteen Strokes requires specifying the ink of each stroke. Different strokes have different ink due to their other characteristics. For example, in the book *Ma Dai's Painting Treasure*, there is a clear record of Gao Gu You Si's Stroke: This stroke is exquisite and suitable for light ink. But most strokes do not clearly define ink and are even blank. [8]

The Fifth Canon originally referred to space, location, and layout- how to conceive and compose a painting. When creating art, artists need to arrange different factors within a specific range according to particular rules and integrate their thinking and emotions to express the artist's aesthetic and artistic conception. [12][11] The Fifth Canon is a concrete embodiment of the artist's thinking process and is a comprehensive arrangement. [1] The Fifth Canon is a comprehensive manifestation of other Canons.

The Sixth Canon originally referred to copying the excellent works of predecessors and learning from masterpieces. The learning of Chinese painting starts from copying images. Still, it does not require the learners to copy without thinking but to experience how the author expresses his emotions through the predecessors, how to use brushes or ink, think about the author's creative process, think about why the author arranged the painting in this way; experience the spiritual world that the author wants to express and refresh inner self-cultivation. [5] The Sixth Canon to Eighteen Strokes requires learners to copy purposefully and recreate based on copying. However, due to the limited printing conditions at that time, the legend of the template was too small and complex to imitate (As shown in Figure 3) [1][2]



Figure 3. The Example Illustration of He Chao's Three Thousand Methods of Figure Painting

4. Results of Eighteen Strokes Inheritance Elements

The following results can be obtained by analyzing the inheritance factors of Eighteen Strokes as the theoretical framework with Xie He's Six Canons as the theoretical framework.

The First Canon corresponds to the requirements of Eighteen Strokes in the inheritance: Pay attention to the spiritual of Chinese painting. The Second Canon conforms to the needs of Eighteen Strokes in the inheritance: How to use the brushwork for each stroke. The Third Canon corresponds to the requirements of Eighteen Strokes: Summarize the characteristics of each stroke.

The Fourth Canon corresponds to the requirements of Eighteen Strokes: How to use the ink of each stroke. The Fifth Canon conforms to the provisions of Eighteen Strokes: The reasonable layout when creating the painting. The Sixth Canon corresponds to the requirements of Eighteen Strokes: Imitation masterpieces of each stroke. The corresponding summary diagram of the relationship between the two is shown below (Figure 4).

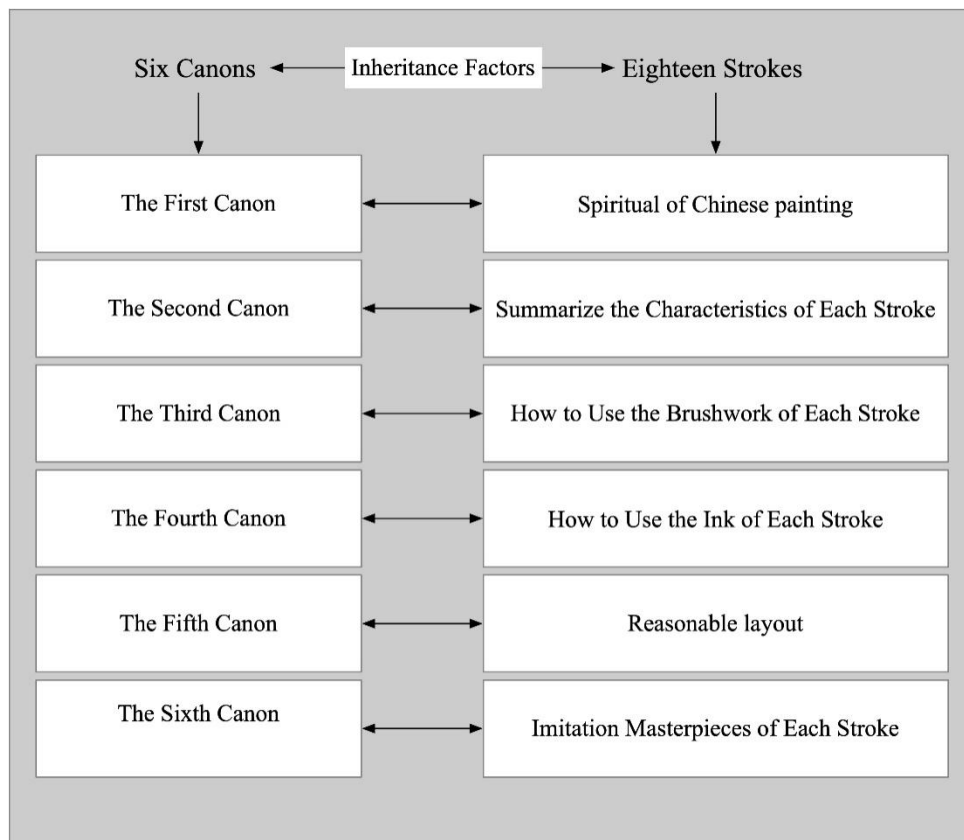


Figure 4. The Corresponding Inheritance Factors of Six Canons and Eighteen Strokes

5. Conclusion

Through the above analysis, the critical inheritance value of Eighteen Strokes. Analyze the inheritance factors of Eighteen Strokes in the theoretical framework with The Six Canon as the theoretical framework. By analyzing, it can be found that some theories of Eighteen Strokes in the inheritance are unclear or missing. Then, the analysis of this thesis provides a more straightforward research path for inheriting Eighteen Strokes. At the same time, it can also provide a reference for similar Chinese painting techniques.

Acknowledgments

This paper is one of the series of Anhui University of Finance & Economics scientific research projects, and the project number is ACKYC22090.

References

- [1] Chen, Shouxiang. 2000. *History of Painting in Wei, Jin, Southern, and Northern Dynasties*. Beijing: People's Fine Arts Publishing House.
- [2] Li, Zhi. 1991. *Chinese Painting Techniques-The Art of Lines*. Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Publishing House.
- [3] Lu, Yao. 2019. "TEXTUAL RESEARCH ON THE ORIGIN AND ORIGIN OF 'EIGHTEEN DESCRIPTIONS' PAINTING SPECTRUM." Harbin Normal University.
- [4] Fan, Meijun. 2019. *Explanation of Eighteen Strokes Techniques*. Beijing: People's Fine Arts Publishing House.
- [5] Chen, Yelei. 2017. "On the Creation of Animation Films from the Perspective of XieHe's Theory of Six-Method." *The Wuhan University of Technology*.
- [6] Zhang, Yanyuan. 2016. *Famous Paintings in History*. Edited by H. Zhu. Henan: Zhongzhou Ancient Books Publishing House.
- [7] Cao, Yiqiang. 2007. *Perspectives on Art History-Theories, Methodologies and Meaning of Visual Studies*. Hangzhou: Academy of Fine Arts Press.
- [8] Wu, Shuping. 1997. *Complication of Chinese Paintings*. Tianjin: Tianjin Ancient Books Publishing.
- [9] Zong, Baihua. 2020. *Where to Find Beauty*. Jinan: Shandong Literature and Art Publishing House.
- [10] Ye, Lang. 2010. *Beauty in Imagery*. Beijing: Peking University Press.
- [11] Han, Gang. 2009. *Research on the Meaning of the Six Canons of Xie He*. Shi Jiazhuang: Hebei Education Press.
- [12] Liu, Tongji. 1960. *Preliminary Study of Six Canons*. Shanghai: Shanghai People's Fine Arts Publishing House.