

# Research on Chen Hongshou's woodcut figure painting

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**Abstract:** At the beginning of the 20th century, various western art research methods were introduced into China, and Panovsky imaging methods are one of them. In Pan's theory of imagery, the most often used in the study of a work of art is: "three levels" theory, Pan proposed that a work of art can be divided into three levels layer by layer, in order to comprehensively and solid analysis of the research objects. Panowski's imagery method is not only applicable to the western art research, but also applicable to the art in the history of Chinese art.

**Keywords:** Panowski, Imagography, Chen Hongshou, Figure painting

## 1. Background

Chen Hongshou (1598-1652), the word zhang hou, named Lao Lian, in his later years and also called regret, not late, old late and so on.(Fig.1) In Zhuji, Zhejiang province, Chen Hongshou was a versatile painter. Flower-and-bird painting and landscape painting were all famous at that time, but his most outstanding achievement was figure painting. The picture is decorative, delicate and delicate content, emphasize the pen, emphasize the lines, strange shape, ancient exaggeration, bold innovation, novel layout; the variety of creative themes are the main characteristics of Chen Hongshou's figure painting. From the age of twenty to forty, Hong Shou traveled among the literati and poets, living a loose life of drinking wine and decline. During Chongzhen of the Ming Dynasty, he went to Beijing twice and was called to copy the portraits of the emperors and supervise the students. Therefore, he had the opportunity to read the imperial paintings. Later, he returned to his hometown in the south because he was dissatisfied with the government.



Figure 1: A portrait of Cheng hongshou

Living in the Ming and Qing Dynasty, Chen Hongshou was a literati painter with high attainments in the field of art. Although he showed his incomparable talent in art since he was young, he was always depressed and unable to show his ambition due to the particularity of his age. Chen Hongshou won the scholar in the forty-sixth year of Wanli (1618), which was at the age of 21. Since then, although he did not give up the scientific examination in Beijing, but he had not improved in his official career. It was not until more than 20 years later that Chen Hongshou passed the examination after several twists and turns, but only a year later, he chose to leave the capital for various reasons and returned to his hometown southward. The painting "Drink and read Li Sao" was on the boat on his way home. [1]This article tries

to explain and analyze the art by Panowski's imagery method, which describes everything in the painting; what theme Chen wants to represent in the work; what factors (cultural, social, historical events) when he created the work; and an immature discussion from these three levels.

## 2. Three levels in Panowski Imagery in Panowski's theory of imagery

When Panowski analyzes a work of art, he divides its meaning into three levels: the first level is the "pre-image description", and the main function is to describe all the recognizable people and objects in the art, and to carefully observe them. It is very important to examine and list every item in the art, because these basic descriptions are the prerequisites for providing a correct interpretation at the second and third levels later. The second level is "image analysis", this level and the first level of intuitive simple different, began to slightly depth analysis of art, mainly to explore the art images implied theme and objects of symbolic significance, the third level is "image interpretation", in this level, we should combine the era of art is created, culture, environmental background to study why the creators want to create the art.

The "three levels" theory mentioned by Panovsky in his introduction to his book, *Imagery Studies: The Humanistic Theme of Renaissance Art*, is more applicable to the study of western works of art. [2] For example, with Panovsky's graphic analysis Masaccio in the 1420s painted in the European Renaissance capital of Florence in the wall "tax silver" can be found that this is a painting according to Matthew mentioned a story painting, the picture back to the audience is the tax collector, and his dialogue is Jesus, Jesus fingers in the river is the disciple Peter, Peter took out of the fish from the mouth to the tax collector. And combined with the culture and time background, we know that in this period, in 1427, Florence is the war with Milan, continuous war makes Florence costly, in order to raise money to support the continuation of the war, the Florence government had to increase taxes to the public, and established a tax system not pleased by the aristocracy. In the context of this historical event, the rich businessman Felice Blankache sponsored Masaccio to create the mural of "Tax Silver" on the wall of the Blankache Chapel. According to Pan's imagography method, we analyze the whole picture and meaning of the work of art "Tax Silver". So is Panowski's iconography also applicable to the analysis of art in the history of Chinese art? The author next tries out the "three levels" of Pan's imaging method to analyze Chen Hongshou's "Drink and read Li Sao".

## 3. "Three levels" of "Drink and read Li Sao"

### 3.1. Description of the previous image annals of "Drink and read Li Sao"



Figure 2: "Drink and read Li Sao"

Chen Hongshou was an art master living in the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties. "*Drink and read Li Sao*" is one of his representative work, (Fig.2) we can see from the attached figure, the characters and objects in the whole side, the upper half of the distribution of irregular inscriptions and title, idle chapter, the top left corner has four striking characters, written from left to right, the title is the name of the work: *Drink and read Li Sao*. The lower half of the picture is a man in red sitting beside stone, stone case flat with a book, painting man right hand cup on the mouth do drinking, left palm down press on the stone case, in his left side with an iron way, his right side is a wine pot and a vase, vase with a white plum and a piece of red bamboo. These items appearing in the picture are all often seen in Chen Hongshou's works, and have their own corresponding symbolic meanings in the history of ancient Chinese art.

### 3.2. Image analysis of "*Drink and read Li Sao*"

Iron Ruyi was originally used as a tool for the ancients. Later iron is also used to express resentment, Wei and Jin dynasties have a record of iron; in the Eastern Jin Dynasty, the emperor in Wang guide, Wang Dun brothers help stable regime, then alienated Wang, and garrison guard Wang Dun, Wang Dun anger, drinking sorrow, every time to drink, often with iron Ruyi spit, and sing Cao Cao's poem: " old hero, constraint. Martyrs in their old age, heroic heart. "The pot is often broken. [3]In "*Drink and read Li Sao*", Iron Ruyi is also used to express Chen Hongshou's lofty ambition, angry and passionate emotions. White plum and red bamboo are often the furnishings in Chen Hongshou's works, which symbolize the character of chastity."*Drink and read Li Sao*" is the Wei and Jin South. The important tradition of the Northern Dynasty was a combination of dissipation and self-publicity. Xiao Xiaoyun, King of Jin: 'Famous people do not need wizards. But make often get nothing, drink in pain, read "Li Sao", can be called famous also. In the Wei, Jin and Southern and Northern Dynasties, the acceptance and popularity of the quick method of "drinking and reading Li Sao" were seen." *Drink and read Li Sao*" expressed Chen Hongshou's inner pain and anger, and can not meet the master of the ambition of the complex emotions, the painting red man angry but helpless, his right hand seems to gather to the lips of the cup crushed, but his left hand is pressed on the stone case, trying to suppress the anger in his heart.

### 3.3. Imagery interpretation of "*Drink and read Li Sao*"

It was created by Chen Hongshou in 1643. It was the second year that he was admitted to the State Imperial College. It was also the year when he left Beijing angrily, returned to his hometown in the south, and never served as an official. Although Chen Hongshou became a talent since childhood, his painting talent was different from ordinary people, but he was not smooth in his official career. After he was admitted to a scholar in 1618, he had no improvement in his official career. Until 1642, he was admitted to the Imperial Academy. When he wanted to show his ambition, he found that the emperor hired him not for his ambition to serve the country and save the people, but just wanted him to paint for the imperial court. Although the emperor appreciated Chen Hongshou's artistic attainments and asked him to do the worship in the inner court, this was far from Chen's original intention to enter the imperial court, which made him quite depressed, and decided to leave Beijing to return home. Unable to ambition, In the capital, Chen Hongshou also deeply realized the dark corruption of the imperial court and the fatness of the emperor, In particular, too much student Tu Zhongji in order to help the justice, Thousands of miles away to the capital, For outspoken admonition but was demoted and stick in prison for the yellow way Zhou Ming uneven, But because of his righteous words was imprisoned by the emperor's stick, To Chen Hongshou's heart and shame, After his teacher, Huang Dao, was put into prison, No civil and military people for the injustice, Only too much student Tu Zhongji wrote a white injustice, And Tu Zhongji himself, And everyone else complained, Together with Chen Hongshou in the Imperial College himself did not complain for Tu Zhongji, Chen Hongshou lamented for such a dark court and corrupt scholars, "But there are plenty of petitioners, The body is less than the country, Hong Shou's name is also associated with Yan, Ju again can not get, I regret it." That's it, Chen Hongshou, full of dissatisfaction and disappointment, Angry away from the south of Beijing, From then on, he will no longer become an official official. This painting "*Drink and read Li Sao*" is what he did on the way home on the boat, in order to vent his dissatisfaction in his heart, a chest in the passionate anger, not to serve the country and save the people's helpless anger.

## 4. Conclusion

Panowski believes that the meaning of analyzing a work can be divided into "three levels", which occupies an important position in the history of western art. He proposes that when analyzing and

interpreting an art work, its meaning can be divided into three levels: "previous image graphic description", "image chronicle analysis" and "image interpretation", which are more applicable to analyzing western art works. After the introduction of Panowski's image in China, it provides us with new theories and methods to study art history. This paper analyzes Chen Hongshou's painting " *Drink and read Li Sao* " from these three aspects, it also studies the theme and content of "Reading Sao Painting" and the reasons for creating this work in combination with cultural, social, historical events and other factors, it is the deep meaning behind the work. Panowski's image has certain applicability in the study of ancient Chinese art history, especially in the painting form of specific images such as figure painting. To some extent, Panowski's image is conducive to the study of works of art in the history of Chinese art.

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