

# A Brief Analysis of Formal Beauty in Painting and Works-take Song Painting As an Example

**Junqi Chen**

**Abstract:** *The word "form" has always been mysterious in the text. Due to the variety of languages in the art of painting, form is the only proof of art's existence. Different art forms establish different ontological values of art. Chinese painting contains the accumulation and evolution of Chinese cultural thought and history in the form of expression. The form of Chinese painting is divided into the external form of visual intuition and the internal form of independent aesthetics. This article takes Song Dynasty paintings as an example to discuss the beauty of form in artistic works.*

**Keywords:** *Song Painting; Formal Beauty; Art*

## 1. Formal Beauty of Spiritual Connotation

Chinese art reflects Chinese philosophy. "Book of Changes: Ci Zhuan" has a saying, "The intangible thing is called the Tao, and the formed thing is called the instrument". "Things hanging in the sky (such as the sun, moon, stars, etc.) become appearances, and those on the ground (such as mountains, rivers, plants, animals, etc.) become forms, and the truth of things changing can be revealed from these images and images." The theoretical nature of "Tao" has guiding significance for the practicality of "Qi". The harmony between man and nature, the relationship between man and nature, and the care and tolerance of nature, should be the source of Chinese aesthetic spirit, and the earliest presentation of abstract and figurative thinking in Chinese painting.

The academy-style flower-and-bird paintings of the Song Dynasty contain the unique aesthetic feelings of the Song people and have the formal style of Chinese-style literati paintings. In the early Northern Song Dynasty, it was based on the Huang family, in the middle period Cui Bai and Xu Xi, and in the later period Huizong was very precise and rational, further consolidating the foundation of the academy-style flower and bird painting. The development of economy and culture in the Song Dynasty radiated to the surrounding areas, forming a pattern of strong economic and cultural aspects and weak external martial arts in the Song Dynasty, which gradually affected the characteristics of social and cultural psychology tending to be introverted. This kind of mentality of the Song Dynasty's social culture is reflected in Song Ci. "The catkins fly like an ethereal dream, and the slightest drizzle falls like my sorrow." Although it rained sparsely last night, the wind was blowing hard, and after a sound sleep, there was still more than a night of drunkenness. When I asked the maid who was rolling up the blinds how the situation was outside, she said that Begonia Flower was still the same as yesterday. Do you know? Do you know? This season should be lush green leaves and red flowers withered. These words depicting the natural situation of flowers and birds express the self-sufficient and intoxicated life feeling of Song people.

The ideas of Buddhism and Taoism in the Song Dynasty permeated the Confucian culture, and the literati paid attention to the cultivation of character, and advocated literati painting in artistic creation. The themes of flower and bird paintings in Song Dynasty often express life with the help of things, and the poetry of lyrical sentiments. Zhao Kuangyin, the founding emperor of the Song Dynasty, was fond of art and literature, and created a good reading atmosphere from the very beginning of the country. Emperor Taizong Zhao Guangyi admired Xu Xi and Huang Jucai; Shenzong made great use of Cui Bai, a talented and sparsely tempered flower and bird painter, to revolutionize the academy-style painting; Huizong's flower-and-bird painting art form and "Slender Gold" calligraphy art form of "reaching mastery through careful observation", Su Shi's artistic image of "poetry and painting have the same rules". All these developed and evolved the social and cultural introversion, Confucianism, Taoism, leisure and self-sufficiency in this period, which reflected the cultural thought and aesthetic trend of the Song Dynasty.

## 2. The Formal Beauty of the External Expression of Song Paintings

In the meaning of formal aesthetics, form factors such as color, shape, line, space, etc. are understood from the aspect of composition. They present a variety of aesthetic characteristics under the organizational integration of balance, order, rhythm, and contrast. At the same time, the subjective consciousness of the person who is the subject of the painting is highlighted, which also means that concepts, emotions, and ideals are expressed. The artistic expression form of Song Dynasty painting is to externalize and sublimate the subjective spiritual feelings and social and cultural psychology of Song people with these formal elements in the most elegant and lyrical way.

### 2.1 Composition Form

Sheikh's "Six Painting Methods" talks about "operating position", which means that the picture needs to pay attention to the composition and structure. The "management" here is unwilling to accept the constraints of the intuitive presentation of natural objects, and instead emphasizes rational transformation under subjective initiative. The panoramic flower-and-bird painting of Song painting and the flower-and-bird painting of broken branches are two different forms of painting composition. Panoramic painting is based on the premise of expressing nature and requires painters to pay attention to artistic effects in capturing the scenery. That is, whether the scene can be included in the painting depends on the artist's artistic expression ability. The characteristics of Chinese culture make the awareness of framing innate. As early as the Eastern Han Dynasty, there were separate figures in each painting of Gu Kaizhi's "Admonitions of the Instructress to Court Ladies".

Statues, and there are also depictions of characters in real landscapes, are expressions of awareness of the landscape. His other masterpiece "the Picture of The Ode of the River Goddess" more clearly describes the relationship between the characters and the environment, so that the concept of scenery is established, and the relationship between the subject and the object of the picture is clearer. For the first time, the five-generation flower and bird painter Huang Quan left us with the basic style of flower and bird painting with the "Sketch of Rare Birds from Life" style. Like the early figure paintings without the background, the early flower and bird paintings also did not have actual flower and bird scenery. After inheriting, developing and integrating landscape and flower-and-bird painting methods, Song Dynasty painter Huang Juc'ai's "Mountain Partridge and Thorny Sparrow" led his father's method of figuring rare birds to a new form of panoramic flower-and-bird modeling. Song Dynasty painter Zhao Chang's "The Scroll of the Year of the Dynasty" is a representative work on the theme of auspiciousness. This painting is presented in a panoramic composition. In the painting, there are narcissus and Chinese roses in front of the auspicious dragon stone, and flowers and plants such as plum blossoms and camellias are interspersed behind the stone. The coloring pursues gorgeous and elegant, presenting a sea of flowers. Flat in shape but fun and auspicious. This period was the beginning of the founding of the Song Dynasty, and the national strength and economy were at their peak. The combination of landscape and flower-and-bird painting combined with a panoramic aesthetic, which further highlighted the magnificent scene of flowers and birds in the palace courtyard.

Soon after the formation of flower and bird painting, painters began to make further attempts in the expression of flower and bird painting. "Famous Paintings of the Tang Dynasty" mentioned "broken branches" for the first time, with Bian Luan as the genus: "Bian Luan is a native of Jingzhao.... The broken branches and flowers are the first in modern times." In the early Northern Song Dynasty, broken branches were only mentioned occasionally. After Song Huizong ascended the throne, a large number of flower and bird paintings with broken branches came into being. The academy-style flower-and-bird painting developed the "Xuanhe Style", which is characterized by the realism of images, the implicitness of poetry, and the rigor of legality. This form of expression is mostly presented in the composition of broken branches, and the layout of the picture is exquisite and rational. In Zhao Ji's "Peach Dove Picture", the dove bird perched on the peach tree, very similar to the painting method of the branch in "Loquat and Tit Picture". Peach blossoms sparsely adorn the picture, the composition is simple, natural and vivid. The plum blossoms in "Plum Blossom Embroidered Eyes" and "Plum Blossoms with Two Birds" are only one or two in full bloom, with a few buds, but they are somewhat poetic in the realm of loneliness. "Broken branches", that is, the bark that is torn apart from the parent tree, emphasizes the fracture surface of the crease. It shows a mentality characteristic of Song Dynasty flower and bird painters dealing with broken branches. In the Song Dynasty "Four Sections of Broken Branches and Flowers", the Begonia section is particularly "true". The delicate beauty of the flowers growing out of the twigs in the middle section is just a pity that the time is short. The fracture that was split away from the mother tree, the torn bark, and the curved and twisted posture made people feel that

a period of vicissitudes was not easy. The landscapes painted by the Southern Song Dynasty painters Ma Yuan and Ma Lin and their sons are characterized by the use of axe-splitting brushwork, square-edged shapes and hard corners. His paintings are particularly focused on the unique compositional formal language and rational temperament. Ma Yuan transformed the landscape style into flower and bird paintings, so that the broken branches have the expression of "square edges and corners". For example, in "Leaning on Cloud Immortal Apricot Picture Page", there is a broken apricot flower in the painting, and the edges and corners are folded hard in the painting, which reflects the characteristics of his broken branch shape. Ma Lin's "Picture of Layered Ice Silk" expresses the meaning of "ice silk" of plum blossoms, which is hard and cold, and shows the elegant and glamorous posture. Su Shi said from the perspective of literati painting: "Whoever says that a little red will unravel the boundless spring", which has a certain traction for the broken branch painting in terms of composition concept. "A little bit of red" can represent "Boundless Spring". This kind of aesthetic view of prospering more with less is the basis of broken branches painting, and it is the aesthetic ideology of Chinese painting that emphasizes expression and abstraction.

## ***2.2 Ink and Colour Forms***

### ***2.2.1 Contrasting Bright Colour forms 1. Bright Colour Forms***

The colors in Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings are not simply copied from the natural colors of flowers and birds. What it pursues is the ideal color, which is the sublimation of the natural color. The Song painting "Poppy Flower" page leaves a deep impression with its delicate and soft, delicate and colorful performance. In color processing, use bright and eye-catching contrasting colors, such as red cinnabar and pink yellow and other color blocks. And make good use of subtle changes of the same color, such as the lilac smudge at the bottom. Each tiny petal is outlined with even and light ink lines, which can maximize the subtlety of physical things.

### ***2.2.2 Ink form with Five Colours***

Due to the penetration of Buddhist and Taoist thoughts in the Northern Song Dynasty and their influence on Confucianism, some poets, writers, and calligraphers, such as Su Shi, Huang Tingjian, Mi Fu and others, focused on character cultivation and established a new form of "literati painting". The rise of ink and wash forms also began during this period.

Li Gonglin's "Five Horses Scroll" in the Song Dynasty used a flat brush to draw the mane and tail, evenly loose. The characters are smeared with light ink, and the lines and the changes of ink color form a contrast, which is full of interest. Wen Tong's "Ink Bamboo Picture" is full of the spirit of the literati painting of "intention to write first". The bamboo represented in the painting has a tactful posture, and the structure of the bamboo branches and leaves is rigorous. The whole picture is only realized by pure ink color, and the subtle changes of ink color are reflected on the front and back layers of the bamboo leaves. The picture has a simple and varied form of beauty.

## ***2.3 The Artistic Conception of Poetry and Painting***

The tension of Chinese painting forms is closely related to the formal beauty of Chinese poetry. Song Dynasty writer Su Shi proposed in his literary theory that "there is painting in poetry and poetry in painting". The poetic theory of flower-and-bird painting in Xuanhe Paintings also has the significance of drawing on Su Shi's thoughts and enriching the theory of flower-and-bird painting.

Song Huizong Zhao Ji's "Furong Golden Pheasant" scroll is a representative work in the form of inscriptions and poems. Poem title with Slender Gold book: "In autumn, the hibiscus flowers bloom, and the golden pheasant has a tuft of feathers on its head, which seems to be wearing an "Eguan". Chickens have "five virtues", and the Northern Song Dynasty has completed five virtues, which can surpass the prosperity of Chengkang in the Zhou Dynasty. " Among them, Wang De's thought of the world is the subject of this picture. The themes of golden pheasant and hibiscus have strong court aesthetic precipitation. The golden pheasant is rich and splendid, the hibiscus is splendid, and the hook lines are lightly dyed like Huang Quan, the rich and gorgeous meaning echoes the theme. Such inscribed poems, such as "Red Liao and White Goose" and "Lamei Mountain Birds", all reflect the ideal of artistic expression of the three forms of poetry, calligraphy and painting in this period.

Su Shi's "Withered Wood and Strange Rocks" has a strange image, which is not comparable to ordinary ancient trees, mountains and rocks. The strange tree was crushed by strange rocks. The image of this strange rock is like a snail, and its curls suck the roots of dead wood, making it difficult to grow

and even wither. This seal method is concise, and the theme is clear, which is the expression of Su Shi's life experience in the painting.

### 3. Influence on Later Painting

Based on the thinking of traditional Chinese philosophical thought, Chinese traditional painting externalizes the Chinese-style abstract aesthetic style and spiritual connotation. The development of artistic form beauty in Song painting also had an important influence on later generations.

In the paintings of the Yuan Dynasty, the expressions of ink flowers and birds gradually appeared, such as the works of Wang Yuan and Bian Lu. They learned from the panoramic view of Huangquan, and used pure ink to express, revealing the elegant literati atmosphere. Wang Yuan's "Peach and Bamboo Golden Pheasant Scroll" is written with Huang Quan's rigorous modeling spirit and subtle and thoughtful vivid brushwork. Expressed by "ink", the texture of the picture naturally produces dry and wet shades. The one-time use of the pen expresses the elegant and clean atmosphere. In the Ming and Qing Dynasties, it gradually took on a large freehand form represented by Shen Zhou, Xu Wei, and Bada Shanren. Xu Wei's "Ink Flowers" now in the Palace Museum, the image of flowers in the painting is almost indistinguishable, but its brush and ink effect presents a rhythmic sense of rhythm. The contrast of dry and wet shades forms a vigorous, free and easy image of freehand brushwork. Through this form of expression, the author's Buddhist and Zen thought of "no signs" is externalized. Among the modern painters, there is no shortage of artists who explore the form of painting. For example, painters Wu Zuoren and Wu Guanzhong have boldly practiced the formal aesthetics of Chinese painting based on the formal exploration of Western painting. There has been epoch-making innovation and development in ink form, color form, space and composition. Wu Guanzhong took a picture of "Pine and Stone in Laoshan Mountain". In his drawing notes, he wrote: "What impresses me most about Laoshan is not the mountains, not the sea, but the rocks. The boulders are everywhere, square and round abruptly. Color points black, white, and gray, purple. Whether lying down, standing up, or reclining, life is full of all kinds of expressions. "

I have reduced the dignified and partial potholes, and blindly highlighted the marriage of stone and loose thread. With the gradual change of the sense of beauty, it presents the changeable and unified mountains and fields. That is indeed Laoshan in my heart, reflecting my own aesthetics". "Xiang Shui Xing" presents the villages, small bridges and flowing water in the south of the Yangtze River as black and white blocks, large arcs and thin curves. The composition of this sense of form is close to the early exploration of Cubism.

In the performance of all works of art, the inner tendencies of culture and thought are externalized through the integration of artistic elements. The artistic appearance without ideological connotation is empty. The composition, color, brush and ink, space, poetry and painting integrated in the form and beauty of Song painting have played an important role in the inheritance, development and innovation of Chinese-style aesthetic thinking and artistic style, which also makes the constantly developing Chinese painting art more characteristic of the times and spiritual symbols

### References

- [1] Kong Liuqing. *History of Chinese Flower and Bird Painting* [M]. Nanchang: Jiangxi Fine Arts Publishing House, 2018.
- [2] Chen Zhenlian. *Exploration on the Formal Beauty of Chinese Painting* [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Painting and Calligraphy Publishing House, 2019.
- [3] Wu Guanzhong. *Notes on Wu Guanzhong's painting* [M]. Jinan: Shandong People's Publishing House, 2019.
- [4] Li Shanshan. *Exploration of Formal Beauty in Song Paintings* [M]. *Art Review*. 2021
- [5] Kong L, Bo W. *On the Ontological Characteristics of the Development History of Chinese Flower and Bird Painting* [J]. *Journal of Nanjing Arts Institute (Fine Arts & Design)*, 2016.