



## An Analysis on the Influence of Line in Chinese And Western Painting on Visual Shaping Language

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### Abstract

The line of western painting, a rational painting element possessing the meaning of interpretation, is in pursuit of shaping and creating exact outer body shapes; the line of Chinese painting, besides delineating body shapes, stresses the spatial organization relationship of lines. The line of Chinese painting contains independent aesthetic value, “lines are for shaping” and conveys philosophy concept of eastern culture “the union of heaven and humans”. This paper helps readers to understand and master historical development process of line in Chinese and western painting and compares and describes the differences and similarities of line in western and eastern art and their influences on visual shaping language.

**Keywords:** Chinese painting, Western painting, Line, The union of heaven and humans, Shaping, Visual language

Line is the primary form of visual art and is an effective means for delineating outlines of objects. Line can be described as the movement track of dot, is a movement track that can be visualized, and can represent the spirit of the person or object that initiates the line. In visual art, line has always been in a significant position and is rich in meanings. Line is the most basic language in visual forms and is the subjective creation of human beings. Line is the outcome of human beings' abstract thinking and also is the feeling, the conception and the imagination of human beings. Human beings use the form of line to observe and understand nature. The lines, one line, two lines, three lines, one straight line, one curved line and one arc line, fill our ancestors with desires for beauty and creation, which after years of evolution bring about all painting achievements on Earth.

### 1. The differences of lines between the west and the east arising out of the different development of line in origins of painting

From Paleolithic Altamira cave fresco to Neolithic ancient painted pottery of Yangshao Culture, people all used lines to represent objective objects they observed and felt. At the preliminary stage, various peoples all adopted line in painting to delineate objects and images, after which two trends appeared. One trend mainly adopts brightness and darkness and colors as shaping language and evolves into western painting. The other trend mainly adopts black line as shaping language and develops into eastern painting. Chinese painting line is the most attractive representation form in eastern painting.

Chinese painting constitutes an independent system with special and distinct features in world art filed and becomes the mainstream in eastern painting system. Line style of Chinese painting resembles the line of calligraphy. Painters, in order to represent different texture feeling of different substances, create various lines. In Chinese painting, not only thin and long lines are lines, but thick and square-built Chinese ink lines are lines. For example, 18 lines, called “18 delineation”, are used to delineate texture of clothes, each of which has a visualized name, such as swimming silk delineation, earthworm delineation, and iron line delineation, and has special purpose. The abundant lines in Chinese painting are in possession of infinite expressive force.

### 2. The differences of lines arising out of use of different tools in painting

The painting tools for Chinese painting mainly include brush pen, Chinese ink and thin silk paper. Chinese painting takes line as its life and stresses dispersed dots perspective, shaping and picture composition, and spirit endowing for objects. On the contrary, since the 15<sup>th</sup> century, western painting has being using oil color to paint on cloth and the painting tools for western painting mainly includes canvas brush. Western painting stresses brightness and darkness of colors and is in pursuit of focus perspective, which is totally different from that of Chinese painting.

The tradition of Chinese painting emphasizes “the possession of both shape and spirit resemblance”, expresses the spirit

of the main body, and focuses on “outer shaping and inner feeling” so as to correctly observe and master objective objects from outside to inside. Chinese painting stresses the understanding of spirit features and incorporates the subjective spirit of painters, inclusive of their cultures, moral characters and characteristics, into the objective world so as to create beautiful images and atmospheres with profound connotation. In the long run development, Chinese painting has accumulated abundant techniques different from that of western painting. For example, the scraping and dot painting of brush pen adopts the changes of line delineation, color or ink to express bodies and spirits; what is more, Chinese painting is expert in the combination of poems, calligraphy, painting and printing, which is teemed with eastern features, traditional Chinese cultural and abundant aesthetic thoughts.

### **3. The influences and meanings of the differences of lines in western and eastern painting on visual shaping language**

#### *3.1 Line in western painting*

Judging from the history of line in Chinese and western painting art, even though China and western world differ from each in social and cultural background, national psychology structure and aesthetic appreciation custom, human beings, in their primary stage, resembled each other with regard to representation means they adopted for observing nature and imitating objects. They all used line to represent the outlines of objects they observed and used the shaping of line to represent the objective objects in the nature so as to repose their feelings and inner demands for natural life.

However, with the influences of economy development, cultural background and painting concepts in various societies and peoples in China and western world, painting arts in China and western world have developed their special characteristics; hence, the understanding and representation means of line in China and western world differ from each other.

In western painting art, line has been developing like burls with times and painting schools. The understanding and representation of line is filled with more rational features. Different representation means of line are used in order to obtain exact shaping and reasonable space treatment. At primary stage, painting mainly develops towards imitating and representing nature, that is, realistic painting. The lines in traditional western painting stress perspective and anatomical rational tend.

In the west, line is not an independent element of art. Traditionally, western painting pursues “realistic sense”. Painters would pay special attention to protruding sense, third dimension, brightness and darkness and texture of objects. “Realistic sense” is the means and the aim of western painters in observing the world. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Goya, a Spanish painter, once said that, “Can you find lines in nature? What I see is just dark bodies and bright bodies, surface moving from far distance to close and from close to far, and heaving and blankness. My eyes never see any line, neither detailed part.” Ingres (French, 1780-1867) said, “Line is pencil sketch and is everything.” The west emphasizes science and requires people to use rational advisability to understand the world. Therefore, western art advocates reality and the exact representation of objective objects. Da Vinci (Italian, 1452-1519) said, “Visibility is reality.” Since Renaissance, traditional western realistic painting has been doing research on body change caused by suitable anatomic movement under certain perspective angle, but this kind of body can only be shown by light and shadow. Therefore, western art is the art of surface, body, light and color and line is only a protagonist in printing, pencil sketch and literary sketch.

After impressionism, line started to become a forceful means for painters to express their inner feelings. In western painting art, it is not until the appearance of abstract art that line was separated from shape and content of objects and subsequently, the movement rhythm, rhythm, and mood formed by line are fully represented.

#### *3.2 Line in Chinese painting*

Different from the understanding and the representation of line in western painting art, the history of Chinese painting art is a history of line. The development of line in Chinese painting art is linear. Although line in Chinese painting art also possesses the shape resemblance function “line resembles object”, the image representation of line itself has always been the internal core of Chinese painting art. Chinese painting with a history of thousands of years establishes rather complete theories and representation techniques for lines with line as the central base. Chinese painting art has constructed a set of system for line from theory to reality which is of self independence.

Due to their own feeling experiences and temperaments and cultures, Chinese painters endow line with human’s feeling and characters, by which distinctive art style of line in Chinese painting art is formed. The styles and character representation of lines are mainly realized through Chinese painters various decorations of lines. These various decoration representations provide lines of Chinese paintings with their own decorative beauty. The rich representation force of those lines and their strong and special decoration meanings enable people to sense various aesthetic feelings and fill lines with their own aesthetics.

In the long run development of Chinese painting, the representation of line gradually formed some formula representation languages. Different line delineations have different representation formulas and different formulas

represent different contents. This kind of formula is represented not only by contents but also by the organization of lines and some fixed pattern in drawing. To some extents, the formulas for the lines enable countless Chinese painters to add contents to Chinese painting and to continually improve and perfect Chinese painting.

One of the souls of eastern painting is that lines are used in shaping and to represent objects and images. Even more, Chinese painting fully exerts the potential of line, which is shown by the application of pencil and Chinese ink in painting. From this point, the shaping meanings of line in eastern painting appear to be more abstract with the spirit of art.

### *3.3 The differences of line and influence*

Generally speaking, the line delineation of western painting aims at shaping and creating exact outer body shape and is a rational painting element with the meaning of interpretation; the line delineation of Chinese painting, besides delineating body shapes, stresses spatial organization relationship of lines. The line of Chinese painting contains independent aesthetic value, “lines are for shaping” and conveys philosophy concept of eastern culture “the union of heaven and humans”. Therefore, to learn from the representation means of line in western painting art and pass down the spirit of line of Chinese painting and to understand and master the historical development process of line in Chinese and western painting art and their differences and similarities are meaningful for the communication between and the development of the future Chinese and western painting art.

### **References**

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