

Analyzing Visual Contrast in the Shepherd's Flute: An Application of Xie He's Six Principles in Ink Animation

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Abstract

This paper examines the visual contrast in the ink animation *The Shepherd's Flute* through the framework of the Six Methods proposed by Xie He. It explores how traditional ink painting techniques are integrated with modern animation technology, creating a dynamic interplay between visual conflict and harmony. By analyzing the six elements—"color setting," "brush," "composition," "charm," "spirit," "vivid," and "sketching"—this study reveals how these traditional artistic principles are embedded within the animation. The research highlights how *The Shepherd's Flute* employs the expressive qualities of ink painting, such as fluid brushwork, tonal variations, and spontaneous composition, to achieve a visually striking contrast. The fusion of these classical methods with modern animation tools not only enhances the aesthetic depth of the film but also enriches its narrative and emotional impact. Through this analysis, the paper underscores the potential of integrating traditional artistic expressions with contemporary animation techniques, contributing to the broader discourse on the evolution of ink animation in the digital age.

Keywords: Xie He's Six Principles, Ink art, Visual Contrast, Modern animation, Artistic expressions

Foreword

The Shepherd's Flute is an ink painting animation work that has attracted much attention in recent years, combining the essence of traditional Chinese ink painting art with the innovation of modern animation technology. Ink painting has a unique artistic language and aesthetic system since ancient times, and as the classic theory of traditional Chinese painting, it has a profound influence on the skills and expression form of ink painting art. Based on the principle of Xie He's Six Methods, this paper will analyze the visual contrast in *The Shepherd's Flute*, discuss how the traditional art techniques are transformed into vivid picture

expression under the intervention of modern technology, and analyze the artistic conflict and harmony in them.

Overview of the Principles of the Xie He's Six-Way Method

It is one of the classics of the ancient Chinese painting theory, which mainly includes the following six aspects:

Color: the use of color, including the shade of ink color, the change of layers, etc., to convey the emotion and atmosphere of the picture. "Color setting" refers to the ways and techniques of using color in a painting, including the shade, depth, and variation of color levels. In traditional ink painting, ink itself is a major artistic feature, showing a distinct sense of space and rich emotional atmosphere. Color is not only the decoration of color, but also conveys the emotional tension and atmosphere of the picture through contrast and gradual change. Through the change of the shade and depth of the ink painting, the painter can accurately regulate the atmosphere of the picture, so that each painting has a unique emotional expression and visual impact.

The brush: the use of brushwork, that is, the performance of the lines, determines the fine degree and strength of the painting. "Using a pen" refers to the use of brush strokes in the process of painting, including changes in the weight, thickness and density of the pen. Line is the soul of ink painting, which determines the fineness, strength and movement of the picture. Through the diversification of the brush strokes, the painter can show the delicate scene description or the powerful emotional expression in the picture. The change of the brushwork is not only limited to the drawing of the characters and the objects, but also can express the fluctuation of the emotion or the rhythm of the movement through the ups and downs of the lines (Pearman, 2023). In the traditional ink painting, the exquisite brushwork can often determine the artistic pattern and spiritual temperament of a work.

Composition: the structure arrangement of the picture, including the layout of space, the contrast and combination of elements, affects the balance and rhythm of the vision. "Composition" refers to the reasonable arrangement and layout of the space and elements in the picture, so that the painting has a sense of balance, rhythm and contrast. Traditional ink painting pays attention to "the combination of reality and reality", through the spatial organization of scenery and figures, as well as the size and density of various elements, creates a harmonious picture atmosphere. In terms of concrete performance, the composition is not only the arrangement of the picture content, but also the carrier of the emotion of the work. For example, the distance and height in landscape painting, the figures and background in figure painting often show the sense of hierarchy and depth of the picture through clever composition design, bringing a perception from static to dynamic to the audience.

Charm: atmosphere and charm, reflect the vitality and flow in the work, reflect the vitality and vitality of nature. "Qi charm" is an important concept in ink painting, which refers to the life breath and charm shown by the work. It not only reflects the sense of vividness and flow in the painting, but also reflects the natural power and spiritual temperament contained in the painting (Wang, 2020). Xie He believes that the "artistic" charm of a painting directly affects its artistic value. Excellent paintings can make the viewer feel the vitality and vitality of nature through the transmission of the charm. In the ink painting animation of *The*

Shepherd's Flute, the charm is expressed not only transmitted through static landscape, but also through dynamic pictures. The movements of the characters, the changes of the scenery and the light and shadow effects in the picture together build a flowing and vibrant atmosphere.

Vivid: convey the spirit and charm of characters and scenery, and highlight the connotation and depth of expressing objects. "Vivid" emphasizes conveying the spirit and connotation of objects through artistic means. In the traditional ink painting, the vivid expression is not a simple reproduction of the appearance, but to capture the charm and essence of the characters or scenery through the picture. For example, the painter often conveys the inner emotion and spiritual temperament of the characters through the eyes, movements and the interaction of the background. In *The Shepherd's Flute*, the vivid expression of the characters is particularly important. The characters in the animation convey complex emotions through delicate expressions and movements, while the scenery in the background conveys a spiritual artistic conception of "combination of reality and reality" through the clever landscape.

Sketching: the true reproduction of nature, emphasizing the observation and description of objects, paying attention to details and the sense of reality. "Sketching" refers to the true depiction and careful observation of natural objects. In the traditional ink painting, sketching is not only to depict the appearance of the nature, but also to improve the expressive force of the natural scene through the artistic processing and abstraction (He, 2022). Sketching emphasizes the capture of the details of natural scenes and makes its recreations through personal artistic language. In *The Shepherd's Flute*, sketching and artistic expression are particularly closely combined. The ink painting style of animation is not simply imitating nature, but strengthens the poetic and symbolic meaning of the natural scene through the expression means of modern animation.

Although the six principles of Xie He are often integrated in traditional ink painting, these elements are skillfully separated and reorganized in modern ink animation works such as *Big Fish and Begonia* to create a visual effect with dynamic tension. For example, in the animation, the color not only presents the color processing of digital technology, which makes the picture have the charm of the traditional ink painting and the movement of the modern animation; the brush extends from the traditional static to the dynamic, showing the flow and change of lines through the animation technology; the expression of the charm is no longer limited to the static landscape, but through the action and the background, conveying a dynamic vitality and emotional fluctuation.

Visual Contrast Analysis in *the Shepherd's Flute*

Color: Emotion and Atmosphere in Contrast

In *The Shepherd's Flute*, the use of color is one of the important means to create visual contrast. Traditional ink painting usually uses the shade of ink color to show different sense of layers, while modern animation adds more color levels and contrast to ink painting through digital technology.

For example, the background and the characters in the picture often convey different emotions and atmosphere through the color contrast. In some quiet natural scenes, the color

pair is relatively soft, and the light ink of the background forms a harmonious contrast with the dark ink of the characters, reflecting the relationship between nature and the characters. In the climax, the color of the picture becomes more vivid and contrast, and the cold changes of the color reflect the emotional changes of the characters and the tension of the plot.

(Plate1)



Plate1. Color of the cold and warm contrast

Brush: the Strength and Flexibility of Lines

Xie He's "brush" emphasizes the importance of lines in the expression of the work, etc. The thickness, curvature and density of the lines directly affect the expression of the picture. In *The Shepherd's Flute*, the lines of the characters and the scenery show a sharp contrast. Traditional ink painting lines are delicate and full of rhythm, while digital animation makes these lines show their strength and flexibility in the dynamic process through technical means.

In some action scenes, the lines of the characters become more dynamic and sharp, while in the static scenes, the lines return to the softness and delicacy of the traditional ink painting. This contrast of "using the brushwork" strengthens the emotional tension between the character and the nature, and shows the contrast between the movement and the stillness in the picture. (Plate2)



Plate2. Dynamic and static lines

Composition: the Art of Balance and Contrast

The "composition" proposed by Xie He emphasizes the rational layout of the picture elements. In the work *The Shepherd's Flute*, the composition creates a strong sense of visual conflict through the contrast between symmetry and asymmetry, blank and real objects. In some scenes, the composition of the characters and the natural scenery presents a sharp contrast, and the momentum of the characters contrasts with the tranquility of the background, increasing the tension and sense of rhythm of the picture.

For example, the characters in the picture often appear on one side of the picture, and the background is dominated by a large blank or broad landscape. This asymmetric composition makes the picture look both balanced and full of movement and vitality. This

kind of composition method not only conveys the visual contrast, but also reflects the philosophical thoughts in the work — the dialogue between man and nature. (Plate3)



Plate3. Asymmetric movement

Charm: Vivid and Quiet Contrast

"Charm" is the essence of Xie He's Six Methods, which reflects the vivid sense and natural atmosphere of the work. In *The Shepherd's Flute*, the charm is vividly displayed through the movements of the characters, the changes of the scenery and the mobility in the picture. The "ink charm" of ink painting has been enhanced through digital technology, especially in the gradient of ink painting and the effect of water flow, the fluidity and natural sense of ink charm are shown more vividly through the intervention of animation technology.

In some plots, the contrast between the expression of the characters and the background is very strong, and the vitality of the characters is in sharp contrast with the tranquility of the surrounding environment, reflecting the vitality and sense of rhythm of the picture. (Plate4)



Plate4. Life force and the rhythm of nature

Vivid: the Contrast between Characters and Scenery Spirit

Xie He's "vivid" requires that paintings can convey the inner spirit and vitality of the image. In *The Shepherd boy's Flute*, the emotions of the characters are displayed through dynamic expression and expression capture, while the natural scene in the background is presented in a quiet and ethereal way, in contrast with the charm of the characters.

For example, the interaction between the characters and the natural scenery in the animation is often accompanied by emotional changes, and the movements and expressions of the characters express the complex inner activities, while the natural scene conveys the effect of "virtual and reality" through the combination of stillness and flow, which makes the spirit of the characters and the connotation of the scenery complement each other. (Plate5)



Plate5. The contrast between the characters and the spirit of the scenery

Sketching: the Comparison between Reality and Performance

"Sketching" emphasizes the true depiction of natural scenery, but in *The Shepherd's Flute*, there is a contrast between the authenticity of sketching and the abstract expression of ink painting. In many scenes, although the natural scene of the background is presented in a realistic way, it also forms the visual effect of virtual and real through the fuzzy processing of ink painting and the abstraction processing of animation (Wang, 2024).

This contrast not only shows the creativity and expression of art, but also makes the audience feel the integration and dialogue of the traditional ink painting techniques and the expression of modern animation.

Conclusion

Through the analysis based on the principle of Xie He's Six Methods, we can see that the work skillfully combines the essence of traditional ink art with the innovation of modern animation technology in visual contrast. Through the contrast and fusion of color setting, brushwork, composition, charm, vivid spirit and sketching, the work not only shows the tension of visual conflicts, but also conveys profound emotional and philosophical significance through these conflicts. The Xie He's Six Principles provide the framework of artistic expression for *The Shepherd's Flute*, while modern animation technology injects new vitality into it, making this work form a distinct artistic feature in the dialogue between tradition and modernity.

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