

Stylization and individuation: the concept and style of space in Chinese and Persian painting images in Han and Tang Dynasties

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Abstract

During the Han and Tang Dynasties, the exchange of handicraft culture between China and Persia significantly promoted economic development, advanced diplomatic relations, improved the material and cultural life of the people, enriched their spiritual enjoyment, and held a critical position in the history of East-West handicraft cultural exchange. The methods of image composition in Chinese painting and Persian miniature painting differ, yet there are mutual influences. The images reflect the national uniqueness and cultural diversity of both countries due to the differences in functional space. This paper explores the communication between China and Persia in painting images during the Han and Tang Dynasties by examining three aspects: composition, space concept, and style of Chinese painting and Persian detailed photos. It reveals the mutual influences formed in exploring stylization and individuation while maintaining the distinctive characteristics of the art communication path.

Keywords Han and Tang dynasties, Persian painting, space concept style

1 Introduction

During the Han and Tang Dynasties, China and Persia maintained a consistently friendly diplomatic relationship. Both artistic exchanges, representing material culture, and religious communications, representing spiritual culture, enriched the material lives and national cultures of both peoples. During this period, traditional Chinese paintings and images featured unique spatial concepts and styles that reflected the characteristics and aesthetic principles of the Chinese nation. Persian miniature painting is the most typical and valuable art form of Persian medieval art. It began with the decoration of border patterns in the *Qur'an* and was widely used in book illustrations and covers, jewelry boxes, mirror frames, badges, and other items. The themes of Persian miniature paintings initially included myths, fables, and legends, and later expanded to include history, love, war, hunting, and other subjects. These paintings emphasize detailed depiction and description, highlighting the delicacy and intricacy of the artwork. Over time, a distinctive localized Persian style emerged, characterized by an overall emphasis on decorative beauty.¹ Throughout its artistic development, Persian miniature painting continuously absorbed the artistic styles and cultural essence of other nations, gradually forming its own unique art form.

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¹Keling Wu,(2014), The Aesthetic Value of Persian Miniature Painting and its Influence on Decorative Painting, Fine Arts Observation, No. 10,2014, p. 130.

2 Composition Methods of Chinese and Persian Painting Images in the Han and Tang Dynasties

In the Han and Tang dynasties, the composition of Chinese and Persian painting images primarily utilized horizontal and horizontal layouts. To portray a complete world within a confined space, craftsmen meticulously arranged and organized the images, with the composition being the foremost consideration.

2.1 The Overall Layout of the Image

2.1.1 Horizontal Layout

Horizontal composition, which extends horizontally in length, is prevalent in Chinese murals and scroll paintings. For instance, the renowned painting "Han Xizai's Evening Banquet" (Figure 1) employs this method to gradually depict Han Xizai's activities over the course of one evening. This narrative style, akin to comic strips, is often seen in Buddhist-themed mural paintings. A notable example is the painting of the Story of the Buddha from the Northern Zhou Dynasty (Figure 2) in Cave 290 of the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang, which is a quintessential horizontal composition. The mural spans vertically and is divided into several layers, depicting multiple time and space narratives within the same image. Scholars have suggested that this technique was introduced from the Western regions. Although many horizontal frescoes have been discovered in the murals of Han Tombs, they typically illustrate a single storyline. Prior to the advent of Buddhism, Chinese murals rarely employed compositions to express continuous storylines. Most Chinese mural paintings feature horizontal, continuous development with left-right symmetry. For example, the murals of Yongle Palace and the Dunhuang Grottoes achieve subtle variations within the uniform left-right composition, presenting a unified and tranquil formal beauty. This approach also emphasizes the significance of the subject matter, which is a hallmark of influential works in Chinese mural painting. China boasts a long history and rich tradition of mural art.



Figure 1: Part of Han Xizai's Banquet in the Southern Tang Dynasty (copy of Song Dynasty)

2.1.2 Pingyuan style

Flat and far composition, that is, free arrangement of composition in a painting plane, often seen in the paintings of Sassanid Persia. The images reproduced in Persian fine painting interpret Persian aesthetics,

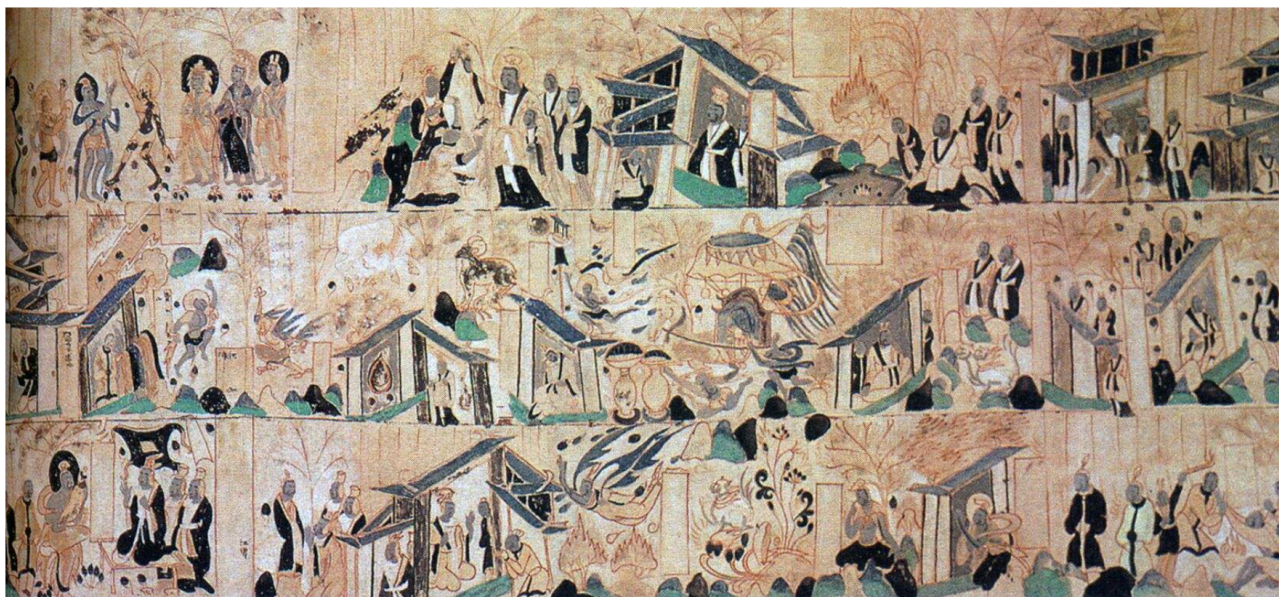


Figure 2: Part of the Buddhist Story Painting of the Northern Zhou Dynasty in Cave 290 of Mogao Grottoes, Dunhuang

and its decorative and symbolic connotations have become the carrier of distinct national characteristics in Islamic art. Therefore, fine painting has become a unique type of craft painting. Miniature painting was essentially a kind of "color decoration" painting from the etymology, which was a craft work of limited size, neat drawing and brilliant color. The composition method of Persian miniature painting is freely arranged in a flat space, similar to the flat and distant composition in Chinese painting, and the narrative content of the picture is told, which is significantly different from the focus perspective in Western painting. The way of flat and far composition can more intuitively express the creator's perspective on the picture space, and also provide the creator with the subjective imagination space to give full play to. Persian miniature painting embodies its integral layout in visual observation, with local light and shade painting techniques, to establish spatial relations in the plane. The influential Persian Sassanian miniature paintings from the 3rd century to the 7th century AD were the earliest period in which naturalism was used to depict concrete and vivid objects. During this period, the miniature paintings used naturalism to depict animal images. For example, in the illustrations of the *Chronicles of Kings*, Rustam hunted horses (as shown in Figure 3), as the decorative pattern of the codex illustrations, explaining and preaching became one of its main purposes, and the horizontal composition became the main technique of emotional narration. It not only has a strong decorative character, but also allows the viewer to understand the content of the picture directly, with a sense of stability and order. The image composition of Persian miniatures can be found in the traditional paintings of Persia Sassanid and China's Central Plains.

2.2 The dividing line of the image

The dividing line is to take into account the visual segmentation effect of the picture in the plane image, and has a more direct role in the rendering of the subject's temperament. The dense lines in Persian miniatures require the clever use of dividing lines to divide the plot of the image, and the use of different means such as simple lines, Islamic patterns and Arabic calligraphy characters to divide the picture. The length and thickness of the lines in the miniatures echo the decorative patterns, creating a unique exotic beauty and charm. Persian miniature painting space is limited, the sense of rhythm and rhythm of the

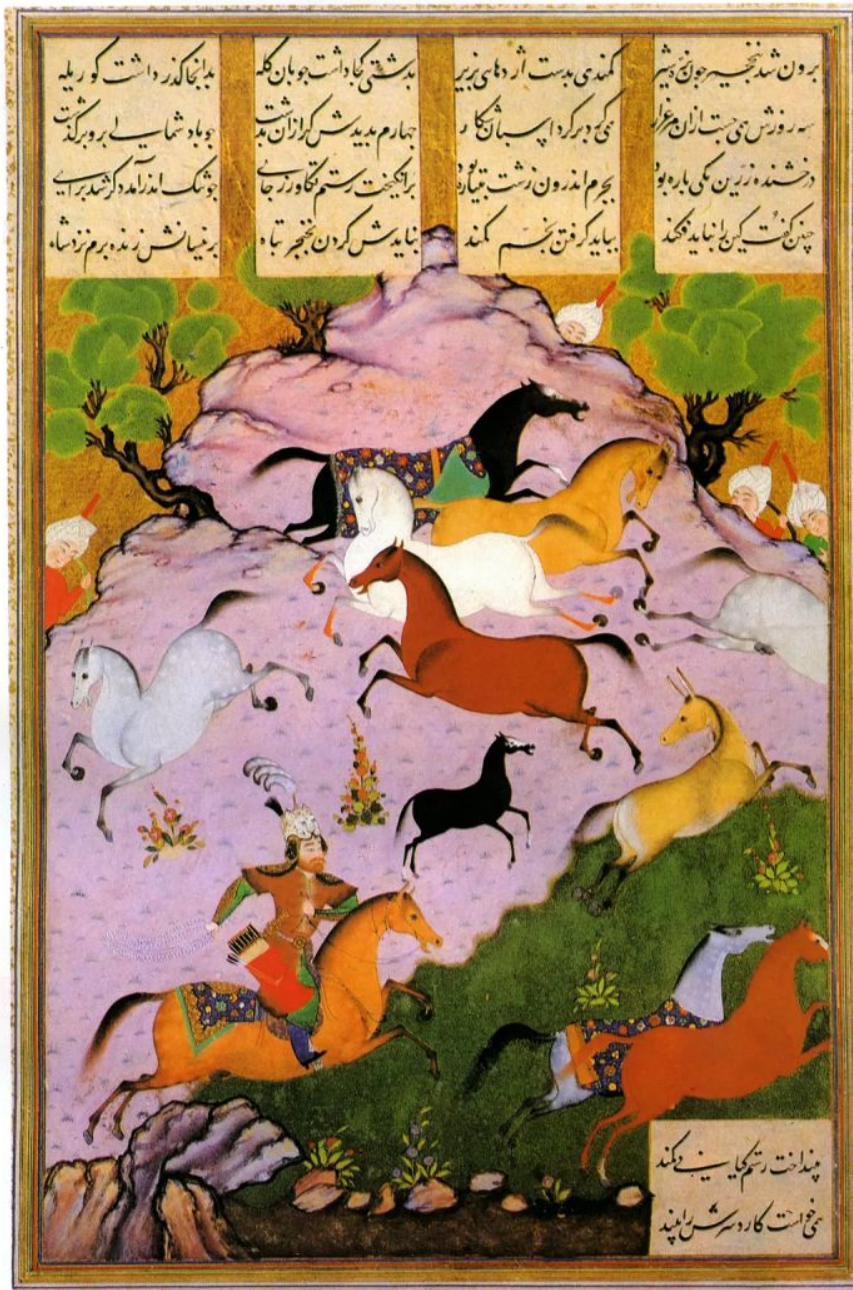


Figure 3: Rustam's horse chase in the Book of Kings

lines enhance the order of the picture, Persian painters have a unique aesthetic concept of line control. The artist uses decorative lines to draw the body, the lines in the picture are smooth and regular to follow, and the line tone suggests the emotional information of the image, which is similar to the cadence of the pen in Chinese calligraphy. The segmentation of images by miniatures painters draws on the use of lines in traditional Chinese painting, and lines have the same decorative significance in Persian miniatures and Chinese paintings.

3 The concept of space in Chinese and Persian painting images in the Han and Tang Dynasties

The decorative pictures of Chinese and Persian craft images in the Han and Tang dynasties are mostly displayed in two-dimensional planes, which has certain limitations in space compared with the three-dimensional space expression in modern paintings. It is in this way of art image composition that artisans, in order to present a complete world in a limited space.

3.1 Planarization and trivialization

3.1.1 Planarization

Planarization is a commonly used form of decorative painting. The painter intentionally transforms three-dimensional things into flat two-dimensional patterns, making the picture effect more subjective and highly stylized. Different from European painting images that attach importance to three-dimensional space and use three-dimensional and focal perspective to express the vertical, horizontal and high three-dimensional effects of things, Chinese painting tries to build three-dimensional space in two-dimensional space and express the panoramic style of things on the basis of scatter perspective. Persian painting images pursue the pure visual enjoyment of two-dimensional space, and express things with scatter perspective. The two-dimensional representation in Persian miniatures is closely related to the prohibition of idolatry in Islam. The figure in the picture has a round face, which is similar to the Bodhisattva image under the influence of Buddhism. Soft and gentle, the figures are rarely depicted on the front, and are mostly depicted on the three-quarter side or front side. In dealing with the spatial relationship, the fine painter puts the things in front of the picture below, the things in back on the top of the picture, and the layout above and below distinguishes the things near and far. Outline the sense of layer of the picture with lines, and express the pure decoration of the picture with the technique of flat coloring blocks. In the shape of decorative images, Persia also adopted more flat and stylized processing, such as the war illustration in the Book of Kings (Figure 4), the painter uses flat composition, through the interspersing of figures and buildings, to express the spatial relationship. Among them, the character level is distinguished by the depth of the character's skin color, and the facial expression of the character is depicted by the three-quarter side, and the portrayal technique is stylized. This drawing uses lines to delineate the figures, plants, animals and architectural forms, to enhance the depth of the picture, and fully embodies the unique decorative art beauty of Persian miniatures. In the concept and theory of painting, Iranian artists devoted entirely to Iran's own religious and cultural spirit. In the concept of space, miniature painting is completely different from European painting and Chinese painting.

The spatial representation of Chinese painting differs from that of European painting. First, Chinese painting uses scatter perspective instead of fixed point perspective, that is, there are several focal points in a painting instead of one fixed focus. In Chinese painting, there are three distances: from the bottom of the mountain to the top of the mountain, which is called high distance; From the front of the mountain and look behind the mountain, that is far-reaching; From the near mountains and far mountains, called Pingyuan. In traditional Chinese painting, the painter's creative sight is flowing, not fixed in one place. Secondly, in traditional Chinese painting, the expression of light and shadow is weakened, and the creation of artistic conception is emphasized, rather than the representation of three-dimensional space. Third, the flow of "qi" is used in traditional Chinese painting, and the relative distance between far and far is used to arrange natural landscapes such as mountains and rivers.

The uniqueness of Persian miniature painting lies in the obvious differences between it and Eastern and Western painting. First of all, the painter's picture has multiple visual focal points. The focal point moves with the viewing Angle, the volume of objects near and far is the same, and the inner and outer Spaces



Figure 4: Illustration from the Book of Kings Ahab at war with the Yahaitees

are in the same plane, so it often gives people an illusion. It is also this illusion that catches the viewer's attention and puts more eyes and thoughts into understanding the painting. In addition, although neither traditional Chinese painting nor Persian miniature painting directly represents three-dimensional space, Chinese painting distinguishes landscape visual space by the use of near large and far small. Therefore, compared with Chinese painting, Persian miniature painting has a more flat decorative sense in color and

composition.

3.1.2 Three-dimensional

The inner spirit of traditional Chinese culture and the unique aesthetic taste of the Chinese nation have formed the unique spatial expression form of traditional Chinese painting, which uses static modeling to express the dynamic art of time and space. The composition of many mural paintings is not only full of philosophical meaning, but also has modern aesthetic reference value. The flexible and changeable form of composition is very suitable for depicting the pictures with numerous plots and scenes. For example, the theme and content of the mural paintings are mostly related to religion, and most of the pictures are depicted with multiple scenarios, which are also painted by the painters through rich and free imagination, paying attention to the mental image. Traditional mural painting has always maintained the painting technique of line modeling, and traditional scroll landscape painting has also continued the tradition of line modeling, but the line expressiveness and generality of scroll landscape painting is still not as good as that of traditional mural painting. In Chinese history, most of the painters who were very accomplished in line drawing were mural painters. In order to paint the subject and most of the scenes around the subject into the same picture, the painters mainly used the scatter perspective observation method which is unique in Chinese painting art and the method of "looking at the big and looking at the small" to draw each other. Like Persian miniatures, this method is not restricted by the fixed perspective law, and the painter has greater freedom to play, avoiding the limitations of nature on spatial position. The space of traditional mural painting is the same as that of scroll painting, which creates a three-dimensional world in a two-dimensional space. It often expresses the front and back of the space by means of planarization, interleaving, looking and overlapping of images, etc. The picture is fully displayed, the scenery is varied and complex, and is often full of numerous figures and their life plots. For example, in Cave 061 of Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang and the mural painting of Wutai Mountain (see Figure 5), each of the spiritual traces in Manjusri's Transformation into Reality implies an important Buddhist story. The painting artists use the unique Chinese methods of bird's-eye view, distance reduction, and scatter perspective to express the vast Wutai Mountain. There are many visual centers in the picture, and each small part can be regarded as an independent picture. Compared with the Western focal perspective, this method makes the landscape more grand and imposing.



Figure 5: "Wutai Mountain Map"

3.2 "Frame" and "leave blank"

3.2.1 Picture frame

"Picture frame" is a Mosaic device designed to protect and display paintings and enhance their expressive force in the traditional cognition. The "frame" of Persian miniature painting is a part of its overall composition, and the frame in Persian miniature painting is full of creative consciousness. In Western painting, the physical frame is more a supplement to decoration, which is a Mosaic device that reflects the integrity of the work and reflects the interest of the picture after the completion of the work, and strengthens the decoration. On the other hand, the "frame" of Persian miniature painting is a flat "frame" drawn on paper by the painter through his own subjective will. It belongs to the artist's expression of emotion and is a decorative element closely connected with the work. One characteristic of Persian miniatures is that they all have clear and obvious borders. The setting of such borders requires the painter to fully incorporate the specific images of characters or plants, mountains and rivers, and the specific plots of stories and legends, in pursuit of a rigor and integrity, and to express a broad and rich scene with a limited picture. There is no fixed format of "frame" in Persian fine painting. The most common and common frame style is single line and double line frame, which is characterized by neat and uniform picture and strict adherence to stylization. The frame style of Persian fine painting is very strange, for example, some images processed by "superframe", the illustration of the manuscript of the Book of Kings, tells the story of sleeping Rustam being saved from the lion's mouth by a horse (see Figure 6), you can see the image of the horse to do "superframe" processing, the dynamic sense of the scene is expressed in the picture. Another copy of Kings, an illustration of a noble hunt (see Figure 7), shows a frame within a frame, ornamented with patterns. As an indispensable part of miniatures, "frame" integrates the plots depicted in a flat visual space and closely links the things inside and outside the frame together, which not only enhances the decoration of the picture, but also shows the subjective aesthetic consciousness of the painter.

3.2.2 Leave white space

There are differences in connotation and layout between the "blank" in Persian miniatures and the "blank" in Chinese paintings. The white space in Chinese painting is the painter's careful arrangement, the finishing touch of the picture, is the need to express artistic conception and spirit, such as the Tang Dynasty Wang Wei's "Jiangqian Snow Scroll", collected in private hands in Japan, the white space in the picture makes the picture more empty and charming, just as Su Shi said: "there is painting in poetry, there is poetry in painting". On the other hand, there is a close relationship between the white space and the layout of the picture frame. On the surface, this kind of white space is regarded as useless, and a large area of the white space in the painting will be cut out directly when the painting is bound, so that the fine painting is in the center of the whole paper. This is because when fine detail painters draw their works, they do not arrange the layout of the picture according to the size of the paper, but draw the frame according to their own subjective ideas. That is to say, the frame is the scope of the painter's consideration of composition, which leads to a large area of blank space in the picture, and the "white" here is not completely blank. Sometimes they draw some patterns that echo the theme in combination with the content in the frame. For example, in the Book of Kings, a copy of the illustration showing the roc bird flying to help Rustam's birth plot (Figure 8), the theme picture occupies the bottom left of the paper, and the birds shaped like the Chinese phoenix do "overframe" processing and leap into the picture, and the rest of the animals and plants such as lions, leopards, deer fill the "white space", which is also part of the fine painting decorative art performance. It can not be ignored.

It can be seen that the "frame" and "blank space" in Persian painting images represent the unique charm and innovation of Persian miniatures. Painters can set limitations on the painting paper, but also beyond the limitations, so that the picture becomes fresh and interesting, fully demonstrating the ingenuity and new ideas of the painting.



Figure 6: Illustration of "Kings" The horse rescues the sleeping Rustam

4 The style of Chinese and Persian painting images in the Han and Tang Dynasties

4.1 Stylization and individuation of image styles

The images of Persian craft tend to be more stylized in order to unify the style and make it easy to recognize, which to some extent is more conducive to the spread of Persian style images. The universality and commonness of Persian miniature painting make it a highly stylized painting art. When a stylized painting becomes a classic, it has its special aesthetic feeling. The creative subject matter, form and skills of the predecessors are all models for the later generations of apprentices to imitate, basically inheriting



Figure 7: Illustration of "Kings" the aristocrat hunting

the stylization in form and content. The classic stories and scenes in Persian literary works have not lost the language and plot charm of their image expression under the repeated description of the miniatures in different times, and can still attract the public to read continuously, which is the aesthetic value of the same aesthetic identity of Persian art in the highly stylized. When describing specific plots, Persian miniatures pay attention to the universality and commonality of the subject. Capture the personality and particularity of the subject of the image with human eyes, and sum up the universality and commonality of the figure in the picture through the painter's understanding. People's understanding of universality and generality is summarized from many personalities and particularities, which needs to be thought and summarized.



Figure 8: Illustration of the Book of Kings Rustam is born

It is the universality and generality that people realize after a certain amount of contact, and then give to their own understanding. In the eyes of God, all people and things are the same, and human memory is the understanding given by God, which can be blinded by the complexities of the world. After a long and repeated training, the innate memory of a miniature painter is awakened, and the miniature painting presents a universal image. Persian miniature painting inherits the beauty of the artistic conception of Eastern poetry and painting, and absorbs the rigorous order of Byzantine painting. For example, the miniature painting "The King and His Seven Domed Pavilions of Different Colors" (see Figure 9), which is collected in the Cleveland Museum of Art, uses a large number of straight lines to divide the picture

geometrically, forming orderly Spaces of varying sizes. In the geometric space, the round and soft figures break the monogeneity of the formula and add infinite interest to the rigorous and orderly picture. The picture has squares and circles, and curves and straight lines are unified in the picture. The delicate figures are arranged in neat combinations, and the lines are soft and delicate, complementing the geometric architecture, tapestries and doors and Windows.

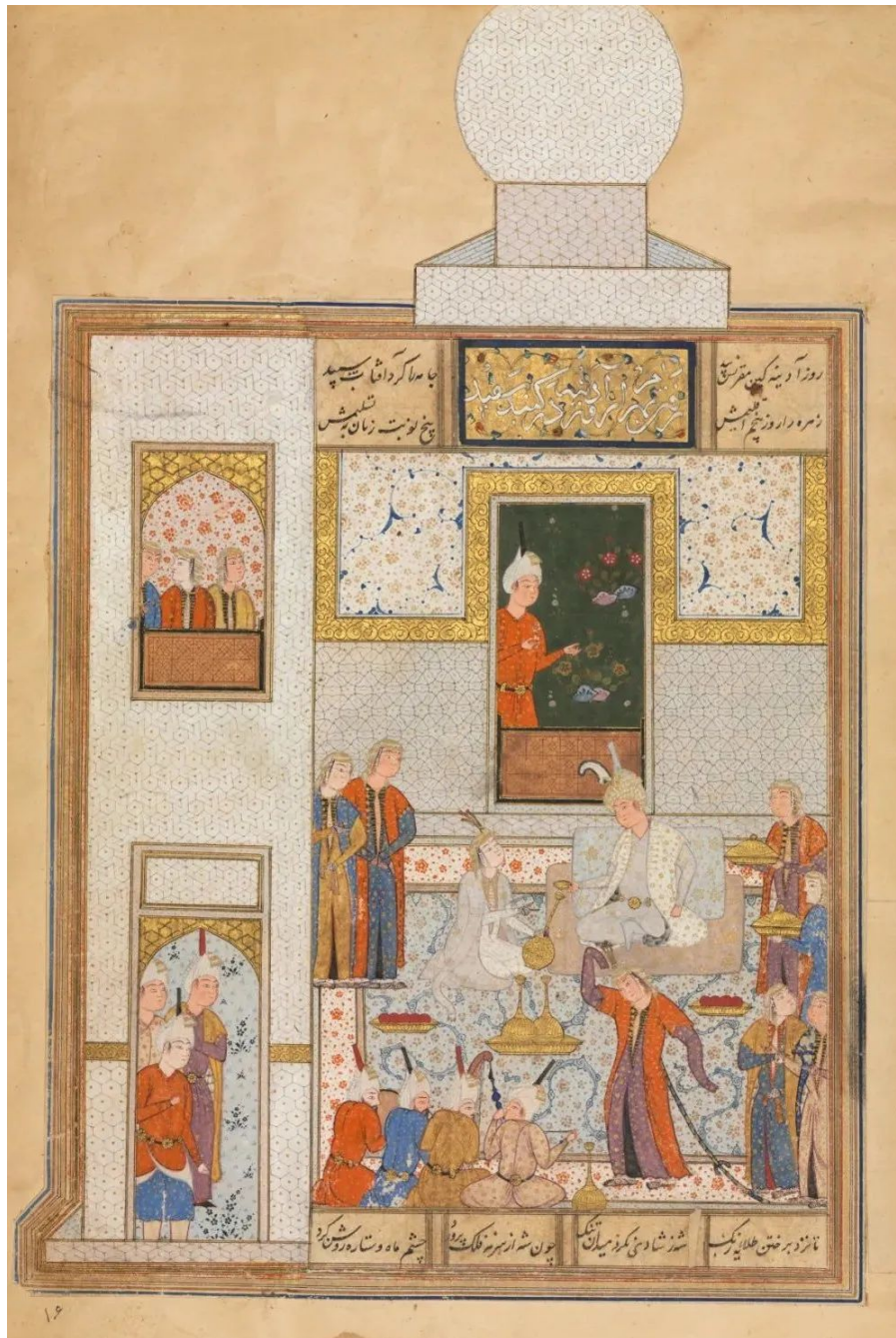


Figure 9: The King and His Seven Domed Pavilions of Different Colors

The essence of the picture conveyed by Chinese craft images is the expression of individual characteristics. The decorative pictures involved in Chinese arts and crafts pay more attention to the likeness of the spirit than the lifelike. The images of Chinese crafts pay more attention to personalized creation, to highlight the style of the maker and the identity of the user, and to learn and innovate flexibly according to the different objects of consumption and appreciation. Since the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties,

Chinese figure painting has gradually become a formal and complete type of painting. From Shaikh's "Six Methods", we can not only find out the "vividness" that Chinese figure painting highly values. We can also see the creation requirements for other art forms, such as calligraphy, furniture, garden landscape and so on. In the period of Sassanid Dynasty, with the improvement of color concepts and artistic techniques, the understanding of light and color in Byzantium and the influence of the Eastern painting paradigm, the miniature painting also reached a complete level of system. In the case of figure painting, the grasp of verve in Persian miniatures is an important factor in shaping the distinctive personality or characteristics of the subject of the image. The outline, posture, facial features and clothing of the figure together form the effect of "likeness" to someone. At the same time, "likeness" is also the embodiment of the commonness of the figure.

4.2 The "protagonist" and "omniscient" perspective of the image

4.2.1 The "protagonist" perspective

The image "protagonist" is the position and function of the "protagonist" established in comparison with the image. This kind of contrast mainly exists in the figure murals, mainly through the size change, forming a visual effect of convergence, expressing the relationship between strength and weakness, highlighting the important position of the subject figure. This kind of painting changes in unity, highlights the difference in status and identity of images in a picture with commonality and overall connection, and forms a strong sense of rhythmic and rhythmic beauty. The perspective of "protagonist" itself is also in line with traditional Chinese aesthetics – size contrast, density contrast, gathering and scattering contrast, etc. It seems contradictory, but harmonious and unified. For example, Yan Liben's figure painting "Picture of Emperors of All Dynasties" (Figure 10) of Tang Dynasty lays out the picture with "protagonist". Even if the viewer cannot identify the identity of the protagonist one by one in the overall image, At a glance, the viewer can judge the status of the figures in the image.

4.2.2 "Omniscient" perspective

The "omniscient" perspective in Persian painting images mainly refers to the fact that the decorative images of craft works should show what we see with our naked eyes, and will not present things because of the perspective method of near and far. The painting language of multiple perspectives is used to show different events in different places on the same picture, because in the eyes of Allah in Islam, things do not disappear because of obstacles. He believes that although people are blinded by the naked eye, they cannot blind the eyes of the heart. Although people appear to be different sizes, in real life, people are all the same size. This reflects a perfectionist situation. The picture is rarely partial, often rich and grand in content, in order to satisfy people's psychological satisfaction and visual enjoyment. Persian painters use bird's-eye view observation, and use the artistic techniques of space omission and space juxtaposition to lay out the "omniscient" composition Angle. First of all, painters often use a top-down perspective to represent things, which enables the viewer to have a complete view of the picture when facing it. Since Allah is supreme, he should be seen from the highest vantage point. Therefore, the adoption of the "God" perspective is also a tribute to Allah. Secondly, space omission is the removal of some superfluous objects that hinder the understanding of the object, so as to make use of the frame to show what is happening in different Spaces in the same picture. Thirdly, space juxtaposition is to divide several rooms inside the building into the same picture through the wall and arrange them into the same picture. For example, the Persian miniature painting "Zal Climbing to Ludaba" (see Figure 11) is now stored in the Art Museum of Chicago. It can be clearly seen that the painter uses walls to divide the picture and adopts the method of space ellipse to remove the parts that hinder the picture, so that the activities of the people outside the wall and the layout and furnishings inside the room can be clearly seen. At the same time, they also use spatial juxtaposition to



Figure 10: Tang Yan Liben's "Past Dynasties" Partial

show the stories happening in different Spaces in the same picture. This kind of painting perspective with "perspective" effect enhances the narrative of the picture, and the plot is unified and complete in the same plane space.

5 Conclusion

Image is never static. A relatively fixed image is attached to a specific era and civilization. Image exchange not only provides a variety of choices for artistic creation, but also provides image evidence for the history of cultural exchange in different regions and nations. Persian craft images depict the inner feelings of artisans, as well as the image interpretation of the objective world, which is a typified visual language. On the other hand, Chinese craft images use pen and ink to convey the ideal of personality. The picture is the unity of reality and ideal, the interpretation of the thoughts of ancient Chinese literati, and the expression of Chinese wisdom. In the continuous dialogue between art exchange activities and surrounding areas, static images integrate with local culture in communication to construct the process of imitation, variation, expansion and re-creation. Whether it is Chinese traditional painting or Persian miniature painting, different art forms have a certain symbolic meaning when they first appear, but in the continuous communication and integration, the original symbolic meaning gradually disappears into a richer cultural connotation, and a new visual image is formed. This is not only applicable to the exchange and dissemination of painting images between China and Persia in the Han and Tang Dynasties, but also has reference value for the



Figure 11: "Zal's Climb to Ludaba"

research on the exchange of other art forms in different regions.

Biography

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