

# An Analysis of the Aesthetic Thought of "One Painting Theory" in Shi Tao's Painting Quotations

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**Abstract:** Shi Tao was an outstanding painter and painting aesthetician in the early Qing Dynasty. His monograph "Shi Tao's Painting Quotations" contains 18 chapters, which elaborates in detail the laws of the use of brush and ink, the expression methods of mountains, rivers and trees, as well as the relationship between landscape painting creation and nature, and many other unique views, including the aesthetic thought of "one painting theory", which has laid a deep aesthetic ideological foundation for the development of Chinese landscape painting. This article interprets the aesthetic thoughts contained in "Shi Tao Painting Quotations", in order to provide some enlightenment for the aesthetic development of Chinese painting.

**Keywords:** quotations from Shi Tao's paintings, one painting theory, aesthetic thought

## 1. Introduction

What is the essence of Chinese painting, especially landscape painting? Shi Tao, a famous painter in the Qing Dynasty, believes that it is an art that uses natural images (mountains, rivers, wood and stones) to create artistic images (landscape paintings) to express the painter's inner world. Generally speaking, painters reproduce the beauty of nature and express their thoughts and feelings through brush and ink art. Shi Tao once said, "The painter is the one who forms everything on the earth"[1]. He also said, "Those who paint are those who follow the heart". So, in the process of natural beauty and artistic beauty creation, is there a quality that can not only reflect the beauty of everything, but also reflect the artist's emotional spirit? Shi Tao finally found it after research, which is the "one painting theory" he put forward. Where does the aesthetic thought of "One Painting Theory" come from, and what aesthetic meaning and essence it contains, will be described in the following.

## 2. The aesthetic thought source of Shi Tao's "one painting theory"

"One painting theory" is Shi Tao's original creation and his unique contribution in the history of aesthetics. Although some of Shi Tao's previous calligraphy and painting theories also put forward "one painting", they all refer to "one painting with one brush", which is a concept of calligraphy and painting techniques. For example, Zhang Yanyuan's "Records of Famous Paintings of the Past Dynasties" and Sun Guoting's "Book of Calligraphy" of the Tang Dynasty both put one painting and one point, or one painting and several paintings at the same time. Obviously, they are all about calligraphy and painting techniques. Although Shi Tao's "one painting" also has the meaning of technique, he has raised it to the aesthetic level and revealed the aesthetic essence of Chinese landscape painting. This is Shi Tao's unique feature, "self understanding, never the way of painting". Shi Tao himself once said proudly, "The law of one circle is not known to the world, but self-reliance"[2]. However, after analysis, Shi Tao's aesthetic thought of "one painting theory" should be influenced by the three philosophical thoughts of ancient Chinese Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, and have fused the elements of each school of thought, and have been understood by himself.

For example, in Taoist philosophy, "Tao" is the highest category. Laozi believes that the origin of the world is "Tao", and "Tao" is "simplicity" and chaos. It said: "There is a mixture of things, born naturally... I think the mother of the world, I don't know its name, but rather it is called Tao". All things in the world are derived from "Tao", "Tao generates one, one generates two, two generates three, and three generates all things". "Tao" means "big" (too), that is, "one". Shi Tao summarized it as "too simple", "too simple and scattered," standing in a picture ". The ancient world was chaotic. When it was separated, it produced "one". From "one", it produced "all things" and "all things". So he said, "A

painting is the foundation of all things, and the root of all things." Chuang Tzu once again gave full play to Lao Tzu's thought. He said, "There is no name, there is no name, and there is no form." That is to say, the original of the universe is "nothing", there is no "there", and there is no name, showing a chaotic state. This chaotic state has not yet taken shape, so ancient times are "impossible", "law" is born of "impossible", and it exists in "one painting". Therefore, Shi Tao said, "Those who set up a painting's law cannot produce a law, and the law is used to implement the law". If we go further, the "simplicity" of the ancient times is also "vitality". According to the understanding of the ancient philosophy of vitality and naturalism, all things in the world are produced and formed by "vitality". Huainanzi, deeply influenced by Taoism, uses the theory of "vitality" to discuss the production of the material world and the objective existence of beauty. Shi Tao continues to use this idea and uses the "theory of vitality" to clarify his "theory of painting". He pointed out that after the analysis of Taipu's "vitality", the "one painting method" already existed, and the "one painting" can take in all the benefits, including the natural vitality. Therefore, from the point of view of the creative subject, the painter should be good at cultivating the true spirit, and use the true spirit in his chest to view the true interest of the landscape, and merge with the vitality contained in the natural things, and turn it into the spirit of the pen. Through the "- painting" in the pen, it is a vivid portrayal of the natural beauty. The "I" thoughts and feelings are fused in the work, and the landscape and vegetation in the painting are full of vitality, which must be "brilliant spirit, out of paper". The essence of landscape painting is also reflected.

Moreover, Shi Tao's "One Painting Theory" also absorbed the nutrition of Confucianism represented by the Book of Changes. The Book of Changes explains everything in the world with the eight trigrams of yin and yang, and believes that everything in the world is generated by the interaction of yin and yang. Shi Tao said that "a painting is the root of all things, the root of all things", "see for god, hide for man", "hundreds of thousands of strokes, never start here and end here", which has something in common with the thought of the Book of Changes. In addition, Shi Tao became a monk in his early years. In his youth, he worshipped the famous Zen master Lv An this month as his teacher, and followed the teacher's instruction of "saying that Yu Baji is wide and narrow, but also ugly", practicing Buddhism and Zen, and in his later years, he still "rests on the relationship between Buddhism and immortality". It is also possible that his "one painting theory" was inspired by Buddhist scriptures. For example, in "The Quotations of Painting • One Chapter of Painting", "a collection of thousands of strokes and inks beyond the crows and mists, all of which begin here and end here", seems to have some connection with the Zen doctrine of "everything is everything, one is everything"; "there is no way to create a law, and there is a law to penetrate all the laws" and the Zen doctrine of "one nature is all the nature, one law contains all the laws, one month all the water, and all the water and moon take pictures in one month", There are also some similarities.

It can be seen from the above that although the aesthetic basis of Shi Tao's "one painting theory" originated from the three schools of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, it absorbed the nutrition of each school of thought and thus fused into the aesthetic thought of painting with innovative connotation.

### 3. The aesthetic meaning of Shi Tao's "one painting theory"

From all the discussions in Shi Tao's Paintings Quotations, the aesthetic implications of "One Painting Theory" are three:

First, "one painting" refers to the lines of modeling and their deformation, which is the basic means of painting. People often refer to Chinese painting as line art. Line is the basic language of Chinese painting art. The painter uses this ever-changing line to vividly portray everything in the world. Shi Tao said: "This painting has received all the benefits, that is, hundreds of millions of strokes and inks. There is no painting that does not begin here and ends here. When a painting falls on the paper, all the paintings follow it." ("Painting Quotations • One Painting Chapter") These many "one painting" together represent the vivid and incomparable natural beauty. Therefore, whether a painter can vividly reproduce the natural beauty and express the rich feelings of his inner world depends on his ability to master the "one painting". "A painter is a master of calligraphy and painting." Mastering this modeling line skillfully and letting it come out of his heart and do what he wants is the basic skill that every Chinese painter should have.

Secondly, "one painting" is the most basic factor that constitutes the image of all things in the world and the image of painting. "A painting is the foundation of all things, and the root of all things."

("Painting Quotations • A Painting Chapter") Although the images of all things in the world are different, they are all composed of the most basic element of "a painting", and all things are included in the change of "a painting". So Shi Tao said: "A painting contains all things in it." ("Painting Quotations • A Character Revolution") As for the image of painting, the same is true. "For those who paint, calligraphy and painting have their roots first; for those who prefer to paint, 'the power of painting after tomorrow' is also:" ("Painting Quotations and Ning Zhang") "One painting" is the most basic factor of painting image, and painting image is composed of changes and combinations of "one painting". This meaning is abstracted from the first meaning and has philosophical and aesthetic meanings.

Thirdly, from the most basic factor of the image of everything and the image of painting, Shi Tao further promoted to the theory of universe generation and the theory of painting creation, and raised the question of "one painting method". The so-called "method of one painting" refers to the principle of universe generation and painting creation, which is close to the concept of "Tao" in Chinese philosophy and aesthetics. As far as the generation of the universe is concerned, Shi Tao pointed out: "It is too ancient to be able to be separated by too many servants. It is too simple to be separated. Where is the law to be established? It is based on a painting." ("Painting Quotations • A Painting Chapter") That is to say, there is no law in the ancient times, and it is in a chaotic state; However, after the chaotic state is broken, the law will exist. Where does the law exist? It exists in the change of "one painting". Once the "one painting" method is established, all things in the universe will clearly show their image. So Shi Tao said, "The law of a painting is established and all things are created." In terms of painting creation, Shi Tao pointed out that "the pen and ink meet for the rhythm of marriage. The rhythm of marriage is not divided, but for the mixing of tons. The one who breaks the chaos, who will give up the painting?" ("Painting Quotations • Marriage Rhythm Chapter") When the painter paints, the pen and ink fall on the paper, the rhythm of marriage is one piece, and the chaos is invisible. It depends on "one painting" to break the chaotic state of the rhythm of marriage and show the image of painting. When you paint mountains, they will be full of vitality, surrounded by clouds and mist; Painting water, the water will ripple and flow, surging and full of interest; Painting trees, the trees will be tall, vigorous and vigorous; When you draw characters, they will look elegant and lifelike. So Shi Tao said, "If you measure it with a picture, you can participate in the cultivation of heaven and earth" ("Painting Quotations • Mountains and Rivers Chapter"), "one picture is enough". Then I will understand.

From the analysis of the above three meanings, it can be seen that the first meaning is a technical concept, the basic means of painting, and its aesthetic significance is not strong; However, it is the growth point of Shi Tao's "one painting theory" aesthetic thought, and the second and third meanings are sublimated from it. Shi Tao uses the "one painting theory" to reveal the most basic factors of natural beauty and artistic beauty of painting, and to reveal the creation rules of artistic beauty, which has high aesthetic value. It enables people to constantly enrich their aesthetic perception while observing natural beauty and appreciating artistic beauty, and improve the expressive force of works when creating artistic beauty.

#### **4. The aesthetic essence of Shi Tao's "one painting theory"**

In Shi Tao's view, this "one painting" is very important for the artist's aesthetic creation. Knowing the truth of "one painting" and mastering the "one painting method", both in aesthetic observation and in the process of aesthetic creation, have a marvelous effect.

First, "one painting" is "root" and "root", which can produce "all things" and "all things". When looking at the beauty of nature, "measure it with a picture, you can participate in the cultivation of heaven and earth", "I have a picture, and I can penetrate the form and spirit of mountains and rivers" ("Painting Quotations • Mountains and Rivers Chapter"), master the "method of painting", and by looking at heaven and earth, and the natural landscape around you, you can be skillful in aesthetic creation, convey the charm of natural beauty, draw beautiful works, and show the true aesthetic essence of Chinese painting. As he said in "The Quotations of Painting - A Painting Chapter", "The artist who paints the painting is the one who follows the heart. The beauty of the characters in the mountains and rivers, the temperament of the birds, animals and plants, and the squareness of the terraces in the pool fail to penetrate into its principles, and the melody of its posture, and finally the Honggui of a painting is not achieved. Go far and climb high, and know the skin size. This painting has received all the benefits, that is, billions of strokes and ink, and none of them has not started here and ended here, but listen to the grasp of people." "One painting" is not only the most basic factor of the formation of all kinds of beautiful images in the world, but also the formation factor of painting images. For example, the "Cloud Mountain Painting", ranging from large landscapes to small flowers, birds and caterpillars, has

its artistic beauty embodied in the changes of the "one painting", which shows it. This requires the artist to creatively use the "- painting method".

Secondly, all excellent painting works should not only be born from the heart, but also follow the will of nature, that is, the so-called "from the heart". Shi Tao believes that great calligraphers and painters should not only read thousands of books and travel thousands of miles, but also know everything, do everything in law, and understand everything in reason; The meaning of "Qian Xuan Kun Zhuan" lies in me, and the thought of "opening the sky with one painting" remains in my heart. In artistic creation, Shi Tao does not want to follow the footsteps of his predecessors. He believes that the life of art lies in "transformation", and emphasizes that "law" and "impossibility" should evolve alternately in the continuous inheritance and development, and should not stay at a fixed level. Shi Tao believes that calligraphers and painters should go deep into life for a long time, go deep into nature, feel the changes of heaven and earth, constantly expand the scope and height of perceptual and rational understanding under the control of the "one painting theory", and always understand the essence of "one painting" in the heart, which can contain the changes of heaven and earth and the charm of all things.

Third, "one painting" is not only the carrier of the basic skills of calligraphy and painting art, but also the basic element of calligraphy and painting art creation, and also the essence of pen and ink. Shi Tao believes that both writing and painting should start with each stroke and end with each stroke. Calligraphers and painters should pay more attention to the training of basic skills such as "using pen and ink", but should not be confined to the "shallow", but should stand at the height of the body and look at the overall situation. On the one hand, pen and ink should be integrated, and on the other hand, they should also perform their respective duties. The two go hand in hand, never leave, and complement each other. Shi Tao believes that a good pen and ink should be implemented in the picture, giving people the aesthetic feeling of "doing their best and satisfying their spirit". The height of the expression of pen and ink should depend on the "enlightenment" and "life" of calligraphers and painters, that is, the quality and skill cultivation of calligraphers and painters, as well as the experience and understanding of life, society and everything. As the fundamental principle of painting art aesthetics, it seems to be difficult to understand on the surface and a little mysterious, but it is also concrete, tangible and perceptible. It is reflected in the twists and turns of the painter's wrist, the strokes of the pen, and the twists and turns of the lines. If the painter can understand the aesthetic principle of "one painting", master the artistic law of painting, and be able to be specific and use it freely. It can "copy the scenery with emotion" and "express the meaning with pen". In Shi Tao's words, with a wave of his hand, the landscape, vitality, and mood of mountains and rivers, birds, animals, plants, pools, trees and terraces can be vividly displayed by the painter; People who see a painting can only feel its beauty, but not its cleverness; Painters always follow their own inclinations. Therefore, the aesthetic essence of Chinese landscape painting to write the heart by borrowing things will be fully displayed.

Fourth, the experience of calligraphers and painters with heaven and earth, mountains and rivers, and nature is not superficial and external, but should be essential, internal and spiritual, that is, "God meets and traces". Shi Tao believes that calligraphers and painters should conform to the laws of the nature of heaven and earth, and should observe and express all things with the laws of the nature of mountains and rivers. All these things should be "changeless" instead of "changeless", and "promising" with "inaction". For this reason, Shi Tao specially wrote "Chapter 15 of Yuanchen" and "Chapter 16 of Jiesu" in the "Painting Quotations" to elaborate his views. As long as calligraphers and painters can enter the creative state of "intelligence" and "clearness", their painting thoughts, brushes and paintings can also be embodied in poetry and paintings[3].

## 5. Conclusion

To sum up, the aesthetic thought of "one painting theory" not only summarizes the basic painting theory of landscape painting, but also reveals the aesthetic essence of Chinese painting; It not only discusses the expression of Chinese painting from the perspective of "technique" and "use", but also expounds the aesthetic essence of Chinese painting from the philosophical perspective of "Tao" and "body". At the same time, the proposal of the aesthetic theory of "one painting theory" plays a very important guiding role in the creation of modern art and the research and construction of aesthetic theory. At the same time, it also reveals the central idea and ultimate goal of the creation of Chinese painting: to create an integrated, rich and vivid artistic beauty. Therefore, all painters should start from this aesthetic goal and take this aesthetic goal as the destination, and take "one painting governs the brush and ink, unifies the form and spirit of the landscape, and creates the beauty of the landscape

painting that is integrated, diversified and unified as a whole, so as to express the way of heaven and earth and the spirit of the universe"

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