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Waves upon Waves, Sparse and Dense Outlining——An Analysis of Water-Outlining Techniques in Traditional Chinese Painting

Ding Han

Abstract

Water is the core element of Chinese painting. It is not only a common object in painting, but also the key to the expression of artistic conception. As the foundation of Chinese painting brush and ink techniques, lines are the core carrier of waterscape. By analyzing the classic masterpieces of the past dynasties, the author deeply studies the method of water-outlining in traditional Chinese paintings, and summarizes six principal water patterns: the Flowing Ripple Pattern, Fish-scale Pattern, Net Vein Pattern, Zigzag Pattern, Whirlpool Pattern, and Wave Pattern. This study sorts out the evolution process of various types of water patterns from early stylized modeling to flexible and emotional expression. Besides, it analyzes how the changes of writing techniques such as the weight of writing, the urgency of writing, and the straight lines explain the different forms of water. In this study, the author believes that the water-outlining technique is not only a simple copy of the form of water, but also carries the painter 's understanding of the natural landscape and expresses his aesthetic and spiritual pursuit. In summary, the continuous evolution of various types of water-outlining technique has expanded the dimension of ink expression in Chinese painting, forming a classic visual paradigm which has spread so far. Thus,more paintings can better show the spirit and vitality of water.

Key Words

Water Outlining, Flowing Ripple Pattern, Fish-Scale Pattern, Net Vein Pattern, Zigzag Pattern, Whirlpool Pattern, Wave Pattern, Chinese Painting, brushwork, line drawing

1. Introduction

Water, as an indispensable and ubiquitous element in nature, carries the symbol of moral spirit. It also conveys rich philosophical connotation and diverse artistic expressions in Chinese civilization. In the art form of Chinese painting, which takes the concept of nature as the core, the importance of water element is self-evident. It is not only an indispensable material in the process of painting, but also a very common object on the picture, which plays a vital role in painting. The brush and ink is the foundation of Chinese painting, and the outline is the final form of the brush. The outline is also one of the most important expressions of the water image in traditional Chinese painting. This paper attempts to analyze and summarize the concrete works of the water image which show the water-outlining technique in those paintings. The lines in Chinese painting are not only the external manifestations of changes such as lifting, pressing, pressing, frustration or coarse, fine, curved, straight, rigid, soft, light and heavy, but also the basis of shaping the image of Chinese painting. More importantly, it is the expression of the artistic conception of the image and the

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expression of the painter 's spiritual emotion.

The liner expression of water emerges from the original art. In the process of the development of Chinese painting, it gradually develops from the original rough and clumsy appearance of decorative concepts to the rich and varied forms of expression, such as varied, vivid image, vigorous and powerful, tight and continuous, sparse and simple and moist and so on. These diverse lines, independently or in combination, present various aesthetic sensations of water—ethereal, meandering, surging, turbulent. Through the inheritance and innovation of successive generations of painters, this resulted in diverse water patterns, vivid realistic depictions, and unique expressive styles. These different methods reflect ancient people's understanding, affection, fear, worship, and grasp of water's form, enabling them to extract unique insights. Painters convey different psychological feelings through these varied representations. "All kinds of different water pattern depictions can evoke reveries of blue waves and admiration for the purity and fragrance of the brush and ink." [1]

The ability of "water patterns" to trigger viewer recognition and association stems from their conformity with visual perception theory. The diverse forms of lines depicting "water" form a stable isomorphic relationship with the psychological schemas and feelings of viewers. The sense of motion created by lines generates psychological associations, while the direction of lines symbolizes changing trends of force.[2] These trends precisely align with the flowing dynamics of water, thereby projecting a rich imaginative space and vividly depicting the various postures of water in nature—magnificent waves, gentle ripples, vast torrents. This injects infinite possibilities into the expressive power of lines in Chinese painting, fully demonstrating their charm.[3]

2. Classification of Water-Outlining Techniques

In natural landscapes, rivers, lakes, and seas each possess unique hydrological characteristics, leading to the development of diverse water pattern techniques in Chinese painting. The ancients deeply observed topographical and climatic features, summarizing a series of outlining techniques. Da Chongguang of the Qing Dynasty stated in his "*Hua Quan*"(The Art of Painting): "The brush moves leisurely for gentle waves; the wrist rotates in circles for swift rapids; the brushwork is dense for rapidly curling spray; the brush sweeps for towering billows."[4] Different water forms need to match different sketching methods, so as to vividly show the smoke wave of water, winding and twisting or rising and surging and so on. This paper takes the pattern style of water as the main distinguishing standard, and discusses the main water patterns such as water ripple, fish scale pattern, net towel pattern, "zig zag" pattern and wave pattern respectively, so as to explore the unique expressive force of various water patterns.

2.1 Flowing Ripple Pattern

The "Flowing Ripple Pattern" is one of the most fundamental techniques for outlining water with curves. It is also one of the earliest water patterns, originating in primitive societies. Its form generally consists of parallel rows of arcs with the convex part upward. The upper arc simulates the wave crest, and the two lower ends form the troughs. Through repeated alternating arrangements, it reflects the undulation of the water surface, simulating waves upon waves. Different curvatures represent slight ripples from a gentle breeze, undulations from rising wind, or hidden turbulence.

The arced curves, arranged in parallel rows of varying densities, present a changing rhythm, allowing perception of different wave states. Simultaneously, the lines contain rich variations, fully displaying the charm of lines in Chinese painting. Variations in thickness, intensity, lifting, pressing, and curvature greatly enrich the pattern's expressiveness and the representation of water's form, endowing the work with decorative quality and rhythm while reflecting the picture's artistic conception, showcasing the perfect fusion of formal principles and natural laws. Using regularly arranged wave patterns to display water's dynamic characteristics originates from

Figure 1. Attributed to Han Gan, *Spiritly Steed* (detail), Tang Dynasty, handscroll, ink and color on silk, 27.5 × 122 cm, China, Liaoning Provincial Museum

the artist's observation of nature and profound grasp of water's forms, as well as comprehension of the inner tension and expressiveness contained within curves.[5]

Attributed to the Tang Dynasty painter Han Gan, *Spirited Steed* (figure 1) is speculated to be from the Five Dynasties period. Water occupies more than half of this painting. The brushwork is delicate, graceful, and full of variation. The lines of the Flowing Ripple Pattern are executed with subtle, concealed brush-tip entries and exits. They are fine, powerful, elongated, meandering, and gentle. The patterns are arranged in a staggered manner, with well-spaced density, vividly representing the gentle undulation of the water surface. Slight waves rise at the horse's hooves, setting off the steed's galloping momentum. The water surface was first outlined with lines, then overlaid with solid colors like azurite and terre verte, layered meticulously. The subtle application of color, combined with the main figures and scenery, creates a transcendent, pure, and tranquil realm. The water patterns are harmonious and unified, without any trace of stiffness, representing an excellent example of water depiction in figure painting before the Northern Song Dynasty.

In Ma Yuan's Twelve *Views of Water*, the frame "*Layered Waves Pile Up*" represents the Flowing Ripple Pattern combined with the Wave Pattern to depict surging waves. In this work, flow ripple and wave ripple are combined to show the potential of surge wave superposition. When the artist draw the flow ripple, the water wave is dense, the wave head is round and muddy, the fluctuation is high and low, and the hierarchical sense of wave pushing surge is presented, accompanied by wave embellishment. The author 's brush is strong and expirenced, the line of the wave is strong and heavy, and the middle layer of the water wave uses a trembling brush, the strength is clear, rough and solid.

From the specific analysis of Flowing Ripple Patterns in the aforementioned works, it is evident that their function is multifaceted. Their expressive techniques diversified alongside a deeper understanding of water's natural forms and the development of pictorial styles. They vividly present water's physical form while adding decorative effects, enriching the picture with rhythm and interest. Building on this foundation, painters skillfully integrated visual effects of distance, layering, and the interplay of void and solid, creating a profound and expansive visual perception in spatial representation, along with a dynamic trend of flow and extensionFrom the specific analysis of the flow ripples in the above works,

Figure 2. Zhao Gan, *Early Snow on the River*(detail), Southern Tang Dynasty, handscroll, ink and color on silk, 25.9 ×135.2 cm, China, Palace Museum, Beijing

Figure 3. Wang Ximeng, *Landscape of Thousand Miles Territory* (detail), Northern Song Dynasty, handscroll, ink and color on silk, 51.5 × 1191.5 cm, China, Palace Museum, Beijing

it can be seen that the role of the flow ripples is reflected in many aspects, and its expression techniques have gradually developed into rich expressions with the in-depth understanding of the image form of water in nature and the development of the picture style. It can not only vividly and naturally present the image form of water, but also add decorative effects to the picture, so that the picture is full of rhythm and interest. On this basis, the painter can skillfully integrate the visual effects of distance, layering and virtual reality. What's more, it alos creates a profound and expansive visual perception in spatial representation along with a dynamic trend of flow. [6]

2.2 Fish-Scale Pattern

The Fish-scale Pattern is very common in depicting water in Chinese painting, especially in landscape painting. Since the Sui and Tang dynasties, it has been widely used, often employing the method of outlining and filling to cover the entire or most of the water surface, displaying the slight undulations and sparkling ripples formed under the influence of wind. The Fish-scale Pattern evolved from the Flowing Ripple Pattern. Its shaping method is relatively simple and uniform, with more pronounced stylization. Its single water pattern symbol consists of two lines intersecting to form an upward-pointing peak with a certain angle, presenting a symmetrical " △ " shape. The lines have a certain curvature with the arc bending downward. They are often densely arranged in multiple rows, staggered between rows, presenting an arrangement resembling fish scales, hence the name. Although the pattern exhibits simple repetition, the specifics of brushwork better reflect the rhythm and cadence of calligraphic brush use. In executing the Fish-scale Pattern, using the brush with a centered tip is emphasized; amidst the twists and turns, it displays rich variations in density, shade, thickness, and angle.

The Fish-scale Pattern underwent a series of evolutions. Zhan Ziqian's *Spring Outing* from the Sui Dynasty, as the earliest extant landscape painting, represents the state of water pattern development at that time. The large water areas in this picture utilize a water-outlining method similar to the Fish-scale Pattern. However, the stylization and symbolism of the water patterns were clearly not mature. One can discern wavy patterns evolving from the Flowing Ripple Pattern. The lines transition from curves to straighter lines, forming a distinct angle at the arched top, giving the pattern a stable triangular shape, arranged in patches in a staggered and orderly manner, possessing a strong decorative sense. By the Tang Dynasty, the Fish-scale Pattern gradually matured, forming a unique delineation technique and expressive form. The water patterns in Li Sixun's *Sailing Boats and a Riverside Mansion* still primarily features curves. Using a double-outlining method, they are layered and stacked,

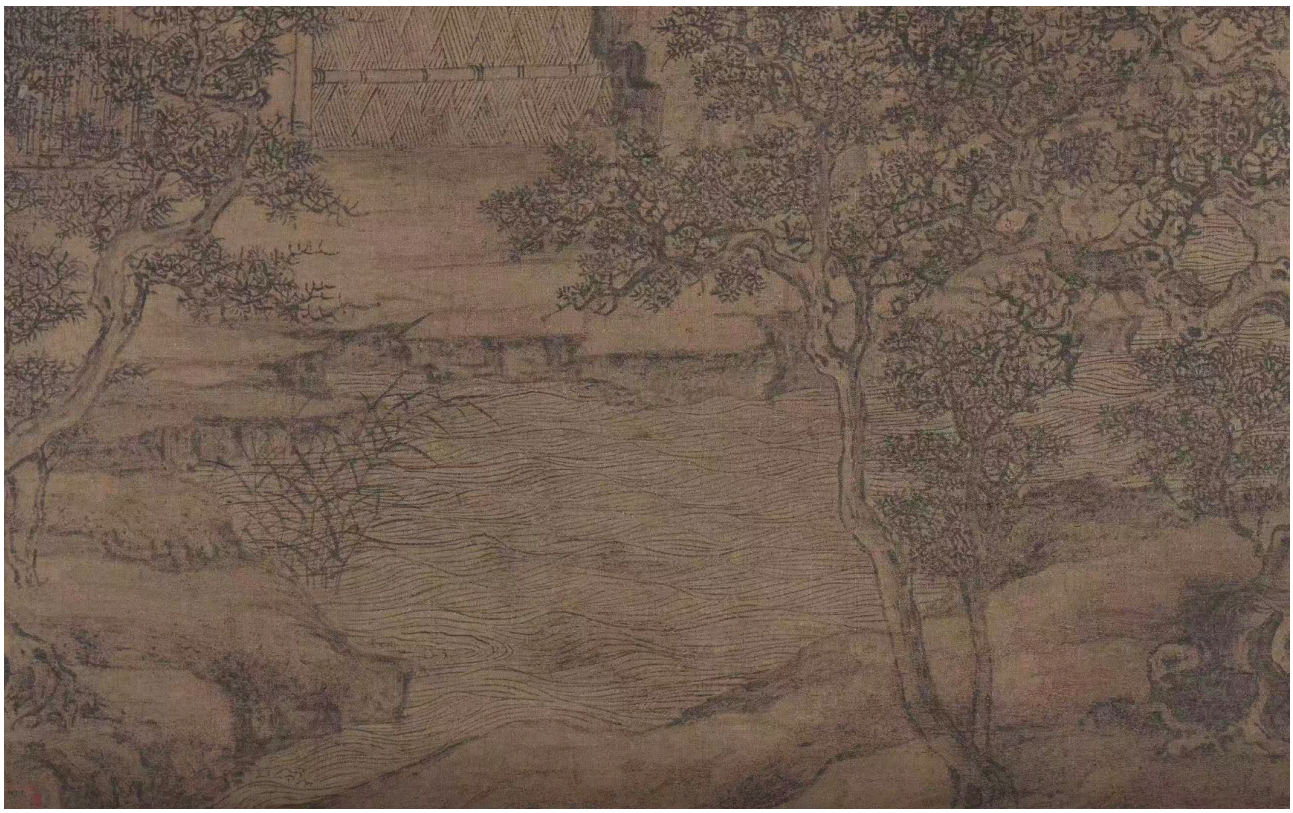

Figure 4. Wei Xian, *Eminent Scholars* (detail), Five Dynasties, Southern Tang period, handscroll, ink and color on silk, 134.5 × 52.5 cm, China, Palace Museum, Beijing

with patterns intersecting, forming upright fish-scale-like veins. This reflects the dynamic momentum of sparkling waves and gentle undulations on the river. A distinction is made between near and far water surfaces: from far to near, not only does the size of the patterns gradually diminish, but the brush and ink also tend towards simplification and blurring.

After the Five Dynasties, the use of lines in the Fish-scale Pattern became increasingly lively, fluid, delicate, and varied in form. Zhao Gan's *Early Snow on the River* (figure 2) from the Southern Tang Dynasty is a representative work depicting gentle waves on a river using the Fish-scale Pattern. This picture depicts scenes of fishermen laboring on a snowy river in the south. The vast river surface is delineated with dense Fish-scale Patterns. The brushwork is fine, powerful, and fluid, continuous and unbroken, with the layered, washed water pattern lines appearing delicate and lively. The artist, using a centered brush tip, breaks the lines with inwardly curved arcs to form sharp corners, representing the slightly raised wave tips characteristic of a gentle breeze. The arrangement features well-spaced density and staggered heights, echoing the dynamics of the willow branches and reeds on the bank, creating a sense of wind rustling and clear ripples on the river.[7]

Works from the Song Dynasty using the Fish-scale Pattern to depict water surfaces are numerous, each with its own characteristics. The vast and magnificent atmosphere in Wang Ximeng's *A Landscape of Thousand Miles Territory* (figure 3) from the Northern Song Dynasty is an eternal masterpiece among blue-green landscapes. The depiction of water within it is equally magnificent. At a glance, fine, powerful water patterns densely cover the river surface. Although the artist used only one water-outlining method, the Fish-scale Pattern, careful study reveals that the treatment of water patterns is not a rigid, mechanically repeated pattern. Instead, it changes according to the scenery and spatial distance. The water surfaces in the foreground, middle ground, and background are delineated using different

outlining methods, vividly presenting the boundless, vast, and magnificent atmosphere of the great river.

Specifically, the foreground water patterns exhibit a typical, meticulously detailed Fish-scale Pattern style. The water patterns in the middle distance exhibit more characteristics of the Net Vein Pattern. Although still arced, they are not symmetrical, often tilting to one side. The ripples are longer, and the pause at the wave crest is more pronounced. The combination also creates a staggered effect, better expressing the dynamics of gentle breezes and layered ripples on the river surface. Compared to the foreground, the water patterns in the distance display spatial changes where nearer objects are larger and further ones smaller, and nearer ones sparser and further ones denser, forming well-spaced gentle waves. Moreover, the ink tone becomes lighter with distance, ultimately creating an artistic conception where water and sky merge into one color, vast and hazy.

2.3 Net Vein Pattern

The Net Vein Pattern evolved from the Fish-scale Pattern. Its name derives from the arrangement of lines resembling a netted square scarf. The formal difference between the two patterns is not significant, especially in terms of arrangement, where both are basically cross-staggered rows. However, regarding the specific unit symbol, the symmetrical Fish-scale Pattern is generally tilted as a whole, transforming into a directional, asymmetrical, arced rhomboid pattern. Consequently, the

Figure 5. Daoist Priest Liu, *Spring Dawn over Lakes and Mountains* (detail), Five Dynasties, hanging scroll, ink and light color on silk, 222 × 87 cm, China, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

gaps between the patterns in the picture are predominantly parallelograms. Another difference from the Fish-scale Pattern lies in the Net Vein Pattern's greater use of slanted and straight lines intersecting, with less pronounced curvature and turning, also differing in the force applied. During execution, the Net Vein Pattern similarly emphasizes the undulating variations of lifting, pressing, pausing, and turning. Combined with the deflection angle formed at the wave crest, unlike the Fish-scale Pattern which typically displays clusters of tiny waves, the Net Vein Pattern more clearly reflects the wind force on the water surface and the direction of the gentle waves' movement, depicting scenes of shimmering light, gentle ripples, and soft breezes.

The Net Vein Pattern, transforming from the symmetrical Fish-scale Pattern into asymmetrical, angular diagonal grids, has manifested rich variations and complex transformations throughout the evolution of Chinese painting. Qian Du mentioned in his *Song Hu Hua Yi* (Recollections on Painting from the Pine Pot Studio): "Zhao Danian was the best at Net Vein Water," and believed it "requires long and even wrist strength, and soft yet lively brush momentum."[8] Zhao Lingrang's Net Vein water paintings stand out precisely because of his continuous rhythmic momentum, even brush strength, and fluid, lively, undulating brushwork. He uses the rhythm of lines to present the texture and spirit of the water flow. Through accumulated technical mastery and integration of life experiences, painters across dynasties have endowed the Net Vein Pattern with a rich and varied appearance and unique, dynamic individual styles.

The depiction of water in Wei Xian's *Eminent Scholars* (figure 4) from the Five Dynasties Southern Tang period approaches the expression method of the Net Vein Water method. In this picture, the water ripples appear as long, fine grids. The ripples in the foreground are relatively gentle, closer to the expression of the Flowing Ripple Pattern. Occasionally, squared-off, paused, and turning brushstrokes appear within the lines to depict the wave crests of the rippling water. Between the ripples, parallel fine lines are arranged to simulate the texture of the water flow, reflecting a relatively early style of the Net Vein Pattern in landscape painting.

The Net Vein Pattern was very prevalent in the Song Dynasty, displaying diverse and rich expressiveness. In Ma Yuan's Twelve Views of Water from the Southern Song Dynasty, both Autumn Waves and Gentle Breeze on Lake Dongting utilize the outlining technique of the Net Vein Pattern, incorporating the artist's personalized compositional forms. The water patterns are delicate and graceful, full of rhythmic cadence. The foreground is meticulously detailed, while the distance is soft and elegantly faint. In Autumn Waves, the artist employs an exquisite and delicate double-outlining method to depict the ripples on the river, endowing the water with rich layering and a sense of dynamism. The double-outlined lines create a strongly pronounced, continuous visual rhythm. The ink shade transitions from near to far, gradually fading, a technique that gradually softens the water ripples into the distance, merging with the sky, presenting a spatial effect where water and sky become one color, the river waves stretching infinitely, achieved through variations in ink tonal layers. The rich variations in line density, ink shade, and the interplay of solid and void within the picture bestow a sense of rhythm and cadence upon the water surface ripples, creating a scene of gentle breezes skimming the lake, with slight ripples and clouds reflecting the light, forming a unique decorative effect.

It can be observed that the Net Vein Pattern, derived from the Fish-scale Pattern, offers greater freedom in arrangement and brushwork due to its less constrained form. It provides painters with more expressive space and stylistic choices, thus exhibiting a more vigorous vitality in Chinese painting compared to the Fish-scale Pattern.

2.4 Zigzag Pattern

Li Cheng's *Secrets of Landscape Painting* states: "Zigzag water, no more than three turns."[9] Guo Ruoxu of the Song Dynasty mentions in Volume One of his *Tuhua Jianwen Zhi* (Experiences in Painting): "Those who paint water have waves with a single sway, billows with triple folds, arranging the momentum of the 'Zigzag' character."[10] The

"Zigzag" water pattern in Chinese painting is generally used to represent the flowing momentum of the water surface. The water ripples have a relatively large amplitude, and the flow speed is either rapid or gentle, but stops short of a fully turbulent, surging state. Based on the different manifestations, there are generally several causes. One is the regularly arranged, densely layered water ripples formed in broad water bodies under the influence of their own flow velocity and wind force. These are generally outlined densely, appearing vast, boundless, and continuous in form, such as the variation of the Zigzag Pattern—the "S"-shaped water patterns densely and neatly arranged in *Clouds Rising from the Sea* from Ma Yuan's *Twelve Views of Water,* creating a momentum of rolling currents and hidden turbulence. Another is the meandering, turning state formed by topographical changes in narrow water bodies like mountain streams and springs, or vortices formed by hidden reefs or external obstacles causing the water flow to circle back, emphasizing the dynamic sense and momentum of the water body. Examples include Li Tang's *Autumn Scenery in Haoliang* from the Southern Song Dynasty and the anonymous *Tallow Tree and Mandarin Ducks*.

In the Five Dynasties, the Daoist priest Liu's *Spring Dawn over Lakes and Mountains* (figure 5), the stream meanders down from behind the mountains, gathering in a mountain pool, its surface rippling with clear waves. The water surface is densely outlined with Zigzag water patterns. The lines are fine, powerful, and continuous; the brush momentum is undulating; the ink variations are rich. The continuous, endless curves vividly depict the meandering, undulating momentum of the water ripples, imbued with a strong sense of rhythm and cadence. The water patterns are richly varied. From far to near in the picture, the ink becomes progressively heavier and more solid, the patterns larger, creating a visual effect where nearer objects are larger and distant ones smaller. Within the overall lofty perspective of the entire work, this stretches the sense of depth, reflecting a profound and far-reaching realm. The whole picture offers a visual experience of a gentle breeze arriving, ripples on the water, mist swirling around, and a beautiful, tranquil scene, as if one were placed in a fairyland. It is vast and hazy, magnificent in its variety.

The arrangement and combination of the Zigzag water pattern lines are dense yet not chaotic, well-spaced, with rounded forms at the turns and rich variations. They also exhibit abundant changes in curvature and length, moving like snakes and earthworms, vivid and natural. This fully displays the restless movement of wind-driven waves and surging water, as well as the ever-turning state of the water body, endowing the picture with refined yet precise imagery and vividly presenting the natural state of water. On this basis, the painter skillfully integrates visual effects of distance, layering, and the interplay of void and solid, enriching the picture with rhythm and interest while forming a profound visual perception and a flowing, extending momentum in spatial representation.

2.5 Whirlpool Pattern

The Whirlpool Pattern is often used to depict water vortices formed by rapidly rotating, circling, and eddying currents, or water crashing against shores and rocks. In Chinese painting, its form typically consists of a dynamic circular pattern composed of lines spiraling infinitely outward from a center, or repetitive "S"-shaped curves. This expressive technique was already simulated and used by early humans based on their observation of nature in primitive art forms like rock paintings and painted pottery patterns. However, unlike in primitive art, the representation of whirlpools in painting is not purely decorative. It aims to vividly depict the momentum and form of the water flow. Therefore, one of its distinguishing features from other patterns is that the Whirlpool Pattern cannot independently form the main subject of the picture; it needs to combine with other water patterns to jointly represent the image of water. In Chinese painting, especially landscape painting, the Whirlpool Pattern is primarily used to represent the state of rolling, turbulent waves. In the picture, it often combines with rolling waves rising in rivers or seas to form a surging, circling momentum, highlighting the perilous state of the water or the rich complexity of the flow.

The swirling rapids in Li Gao's *The Red*

Cliff (figure 6) from the Southern Song Dynasty fully demonstrate the Whirlpool Pattern's crucial role in rendering the surging, turbulent momentum of water. The picture primarily features the surging, majestic river, with an impassioned momentum and circling, surging water force. In the foreground, several curves meander in an "S" shape, with densely arranged curves depicted using a trembling brush, intertwining with layered spray, showcasing the rolling waves and overlapping layers on the river. The whirlpools spread out layer by layer, highlighting the ferocity of the water force. The momentum in the middle ground appears slightly moderated, as water crashes against cliffs and reefs, sending up splashing spray, echoing the waves in the foreground. The distance gradually fades into void, with ink shades and line curvatures merging into the misty expanse, where water and sky become one color, stretching endlessly.[11]

In depicting the swirling rapids, the painter intentionally intensified the depth and momentum of the swirls, creating an undulating visual effect on the water surface. In the line delineation, the sawtooth brushstroke technique is employed. Through various outlining techniques like the trembling brush, solid lines and broken lines are organically combined. The brushwork is firm and steady, concise and powerful, with broken lines, long lines, and dotted lines flexibly coordinated, appearing agile yet robust, full of rhythm and cadence. This reflects both the decorative beauty of the lines and presents the impassioned, turbulent momentum of the Yangtze River rapids. And these curling, agitated waves precisely echo the theme of this work, containing the implication of Su Dongpo's twists and turns when visiting Red Cliff.

Compared to other patterns, the Whirlpool Pattern's uniqueness lies in its strong representation of momentum. Unlike patterns like Flowing Ripple or Fish-scale, the rhythm and cadence presented by this pattern are highly dynamic. This originates from the painter's subjective feelings and accumulated experience during the process of contemplating nature, summarized and formed into linear expression. This characteristic of the Whirlpool Pattern highlights the painter's pursuit of inner spirit through external form. It is both an embodiment of integrating individual emotion and an endowment of spiritual quality to the water pattern through the refinement and integration of the whirlpool form. Therefore, the Whirlpool Pattern becomes one of the carriers for painters to express their emotions.

2.6 Wave Pattern

The "Wave Pattern," also known as "Sea Wave Pattern" or "Spray Pattern," mostly borrows naming conventions from arts and crafts. The representation of waves in Chinese painting is diverse and rich, difficult to unify under a single pattern mode. This paper borrows the term "Wave Pattern" to tentatively summarize the expressive forms of depicting wave spray using line drawing. It does not possess the same universality in pattern as the previously discussed patterns. However, the unifying standard for this pattern lies in the inherent characteristics and formal principles of the wave phenomenon itself, which relatively possess certain formal standards requiring summarization and analysis.

The Wave Pattern primarily depicts scenes of river and sea tides surging, and water waves rushing. Han Zhuo of the Northern Song Dynasty wrote in his *Complete Essentials of Landscape Painting*: "There are startling waves and angry billows, surging and boiling, splashing and drifting... As for sea water, the wind and waves are vast and hazy, giant waves rolling, rarely used in landscapes."[12] This shows the complexity of the water force formed by waves and the variety of forms. Terms like "startling waves and angry billows," "surging and boiling," "splashing and drifting," and "giant waves rolling" all reflect the water force and dynamics expressed through waves.

In the specific outlining of the Wave Pattern, the direction of lines has no fixed tendency; their movement directions are varied and arbitrary, fully capable of displaying the agitated and surging momentum of the spray. At the same time, painters often use wavy lines and curves with multiple movement directions to represent the rolling momentum of the wave head. The movement characteristic of this type of curve involves the repeated alternation of two forces: the forward propelling force

and the downward or inward opposing force. This introduces a distinction between facing and opposing directions in the basic form of the Wave Pattern, also creating a difference between the inner and outer lines of the spray. Different wave states correspond to different outlining methods and shaping techniques. At the same time, painters, based on their personal observations of life and individualized expressions, combined with tools like brush and ink, endow the Wave Pattern with rich diversity. Guo Ruoxu of the Northern Song Dynasty stated: "Those who paint water have waves with a single sway, billows with triple folds, arranging the momentum of the 'Zigzag' character, distinguishing the form of 'Tiger's Claws." It is marvelous if it appears surging and moving, enabling the viewer to feel vast rivers and lakes."[13] He mentions that rising spray resembles "Tiger's Claws," with vast water force and swift currents, allowing viewers to imagine the vastness of rivers and lakes, only then can the wonders of water be exhausted. Da Chongguang of the Qing Dynasty mentioned: "The brushwork is dense for rapidly curling spray; the brush sweeps for towering billows."[14] Such expressions summarize the brushwork or stylized formal principles in depicting spray. In analyzing specific works, we can summarize and learn how the ancients refined waves, thereby using lines to represent the diverse forms of spray on silk.

In Ma Yuan's Water Album, the frame Clouds Unfurling, Waves Curling features condensed and raw brushwork, depicting two groups of rolling giant waves. The lines are bold and rough yet richly varied, employing numerous trembling brush strokes. The wave heads roll, shaped like writhing dragons or demon claws. The lines above the wave heads are mostly twisted, curling forward in "S"-shaped curves, while below they form inverted hooks, curling inward layer by layer, depicting the collapse of the front of the wave. The combination of these two line groups is endlessly varied, supplemented by scattered water droplets, forming a surging, wave-upon-wave momentum. The wave heads in Countercurrents on the Yellow River are quite different in style from the previous image. This frame uses vigorous, dry, astringent brushwork, but the brush momentum is relatively gentle. The lines are full and thick, with low wave heads, meandering left and right, uneven in height, expressing the surging momentum of countercurrent rolling waves on the Yellow River, full of visual tension. Compared to the previous two, the wave heads in Layered Waves Pile Up appear much gentler. Here, the spray resembles demon claws, the brushwork is rounded, the strokes are short, the water ripples dense, forming a staggered effect of surging waves, rich in variation, strong in momentum, interspersed with flying spray, appearing even more vivid and natural. The lines mostly use a trembling brush, especially the curves on the back of the wave heads, with distinct layers, presenting a vigorous water force and surging waves on the sea.[15]

3. Conclusion

The water patterns summarized above represent the most common techniques for depicting the physical forms of water in Chinese painting. However, in the painting process, various techniques often intermingle and complement each other within the painter's individual expression, making the representation of water more complex, diverse, vivid, and natural. Driven by the concept of "painting living water realistically" in the Song Dynasty, painters were no longer confined to stylized pattern symbols. Instead, they delved into life practice, focusing on observing real water scenes, and striving to depict and express the form of "true water." This not only expanded and perfected the expressive forms of water in the picture but also endowed the works with more distinct individual characteristics. Throughout history, the ancients endowed "water" in Chinese painting with beauty in different forms, simultaneously imbuing the works with a heightened sense of vitality. Ultimately, regardless of the specific pattern employed, these depictions evoke infinite reverie, inspiring a continued pursuit of vivid brushwork (shenghuo bi mo) and harmony with nature.

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