

# The Color Changes of Ink and Wash in Ming Dynasty Flower-and-Bird Paintings

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**Abstract:** From the development history of coloring changes in Chinese painting, it can be seen that there is unity, compatibility, and complementarity between “ink wash” and “color”. The fusion of the two emerged in the Ming Dynasty, particularly in flower-and-bird paintings. This article starts with the characteristics of Ming and Qing flower-and-bird paintings, and explores the specific changes of the two in Ming and Qing flower-and-bird paintings.

**Keywords:** Ming Dynasty flower-and-bird paintings; Ink and wash; Color; Traditional Chinese painting

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Since the Tang Dynasty, the development of ink painting has gone through many stages before it can grow. And the materials, painting techniques, and creative forms used by painters in ink and wash painting have also become more diverse, and there has been a significant use of color in the painting, combining it with ink and wash. Innovative and diversified forms of ink and wash development have emerged, making the overall picture more rich and vivid. The history of flower-and-bird painting is the oldest among the many categories of ink painting, and its cultural connotations are also the most ingenious and profound. The flower-and-bird painting of the Ming Dynasty was also a turning point in Chinese ink painting.

## 1. The Characteristics of Flower-and-Bird Painting in the Ming Dynasty

The integration of ink and color is not achieved overnight. Exploring the development process of flower-and-bird painting in the Ming Dynasty, the relationship between the two can be mainly divided into three periods. Moreover, the Ming Dynasty was a period of change in Chinese painting, with diverse styles and colorful flower-and-bird paintings. The relationship between ink and color is also constantly changing and developing.

### 1.1 Early Ming Dynasty: Yu Yun of Song and Yuan Dynasties

The flower-and-bird paintings in the early Ming Dynasty were mainly characterized by inheriting the ink painting techniques of the Yuan Dynasty and the courtyard style painting techniques of the Song Dynasty. However, in the early Ming Dynasty, flower-and-bird paintings were mainly based on brightly colored meticulous heavy colored flower-and-bird paintings. At this time, there were also various painting styles such as ink flower-and-bird paintings and boneless flower-and-bird paintings, which developed harmoniously with each other and coexisted in multiple styles without any conflicts.

Ink flower-and-bird painting flourished in the Yuan Dynasty, causing the courtyard style meticulous flower-and-bird painting of the Song Dynasty to be ignored by the world. However, it gradually revived in the early Ming Dynasty and developed into a widely popular painting style at that time. Although with the emergence of the prosperous period of freehand flower-and-bird painting, it still gradually declined in the mid to late Ming Dynasty.

The flower-and-bird paintings in the early Ming Dynasty and the courtyard style flower-and-bird paintings in the Song Dynasty are not exactly the same. The former's paintings are closer to nature and pursue a broad and profound emotional expression. The composition of his works is often very sophisticated and full, usually in a rough and broad landscape painting background, where rich and elegant flowers and birds are placed, giving people a sense of grandeur and grandeur, and the overall picture is also very complete. The former not only absorbs the characteristics of the latter's exquisite depiction and elegant color, but also abandons the latter's feeling of weakness and tenderness.

The representative painter of courtyard style flower-and-bird paintings in the early Ming Dynasty was Bian Jingzhao, who had a

great influence on the meticulous flower-and-bird paintings in the early Ming Dynasty. The color scheme of his works is rich, elegant and rich, with stable brushstrokes, a touch of ease, subtle changes, and a neat and elegant overall picture. It inherits the characteristics of the Southern Song Dynasty's fine brushwork and heavy color painting school, and does not always follow its tradition. Instead, it incorporates the meaning of the Yuan Dynasty's ink flowers, ink birds into its paintings, and the objects painted are more detailed, with rich shapes and firm lines. The flowers, fruits, birds, and birds depicted by him are highly characteristic of the form of objects. During the painting process, he often conducts in-depth observation to express the subtle changes in the objects. The objects depicted are all in a graceful manner, with a certain charm.

## **1.2 Mid Ming Dynasty: Coexistence of “Courtyard Style” and “Wu School”**

The flower-and-bird paintings in the middle of the Ming Dynasty not only conveyed the literary taste and emotional mood of literati, but also reflected the profound painting skills of painters. The characteristics of flower-and-bird painting during this period were mainly the alternating coexistence of two different painting styles, namely, courtyard style meticulous flower-and-bird painting and the “Wumen School of Painting” flower-and-bird painting. The courtyard style meticulous flower-and-bird painting is mainly reflected in painters represented by court painters Lin Liang and Lv Ji, while the “Wumen School of Painting” is concentrated in painters mainly composed of Shen Zhou and Wen Zhengming.

Lin Liang was a representative painter of Ming Dynasty courtyard style flower-and-bird paintings, and also a pioneer of Ming Dynasty ink freehand brushwork. The overall style of painting is between “form writing” and “freehand brushwork”.

In the mid Ming Dynasty, the pinnacle of calligraphy and painting was mostly dominated by literati and literati. They entertain themselves with calligraphy and painting as a means of entertainment, advocating for the charm of brushwork and ink in their paintings, emphasizing the charm of brushwork and ink in their painting techniques, and pursuing the morale and elegance of the paintings since the Yuan Dynasty. They emphasize the organic combination of poetry, calligraphy, and painting, which enabled the development of freehand flower-and-bird painting. At this time, it was also the period when Chinese freehand flower-and-bird painting was truly established. Although ink flowers and birds had already appeared during the Yuan Dynasty, the “Wu School of Painting”, mainly composed of Shen Zhou and Wen Huiming, began the flourishing period of ink freehand flower-and-bird painting.

Shen Zhou's flower, wood, and stone paintings are also known for their freehand brushwork in ink and wash, His ink freehand flower-and-bird painting not only competed with the meticulous brushwork of the Song, Yuan, and early Ming dynasties, but also rose to a unified position in the field of flower-and-bird painting, pushing the integration of ink and color to a new level.

## **1.3 Late Ming Dynasty: Splash Ink Freehand Painting**

The beauty of Xu Wei's flower-and-bird paintings lies in the difference between similarity and non similarity. The objects depicted in them are all vividly summarized and concise. Although they do not seek the details of the objects being painted, they pursue their charm and characteristics. The objects being painted are very realistic and full of charm. The lines are soft with a touch of hardness, which can maximize the changes in ink density, dryness, and wetness. The strokes are crisp and complete in one go, with a strong sense of charm.

In the late Ming Dynasty, flower-and-bird paintings completely transformed from “writing form with form” to “writing form with meaning”. At the same time, this also marks the formal establishment of the status of literati freehand flower-and-bird painting.

## **2. The specific changes in ink color of Ming Dynasty flower-and-bird paintings**

From the perspective of “integration of ink and color”, the specific changes in ink color have gone through two main stages of development, from “independence” to “integration”.

In the early Ming Dynasty, flower-and-bird paintings mainly continued the courtyard style meticulous heavy color flower-and-bird paintings, which were more vibrant in color. However, some painters were already trying to integrate ink and wash techniques into the heavy color painting. At the same time, the ink and wash flower-and-bird paintings of the Yuan Dynasty also influenced painters in the early Ming Dynasty. Bian Jingzhao was a representative painter of the time, and the “Double Crane Painting” was his masterpiece. From Bian Jingzhao's works, we can see that his works mainly inherit the characteristics of the Southern Song Dynasty's fine brushwork, heavy color painting, and neat and delicate colors, with rich and elegant colors. However, he also absorbed the brush techniques of Yuan people's ink flowers, ink birds, and drew inspiration from the painting techniques of Yuan people's light color halo dyeing. By combining the two, a new painting style was formed, and the painted objects were more delicate and elegant in style. It can be seen that the flower-and-bird painting at this time breaks the boundary between ink and color.

In the mid Ming Dynasty, the changes in ink and wash colors in flower-and-bird paintings had already appeared to blend.

From Lin Liang's paintings, it can be seen that their coloring was simple and the ink was agile. He boldly expressed the neat and meticulous realistic flower-and-bird paintings in a concise and concise manner using ink and wash. On the basis of absorbing the tradition of Yuan Dynasty ink, flower-and-bird paintings, and the two Song Dynasty courtyard style flower-and-bird paintings, the distance between ink and wash colors was broken, and his innovation in boneless painting method was achieved, It also broke the tradition of realistic and rich courtyard style flower-and-bird paintings of its predecessors, incorporating strong and bold brushstrokes. The painted objects are beautiful and detailed, with rich and vivid ink colors. We mentioned earlier that Lv Ji's painting style inherits the painting style of Bian Jingzhao and incorporates Lin Liang's ink painting method. The ink represents the background of mountains and stones, highlighting the neat and delicate flowers and birds. The overall picture is rich, broad, and light. He is skilled in combining ink freehand brushwork with meticulous color design, breaking through the previous color constraints, and further combining ink and color.

In the mid to late Ming Dynasty, Shen Zhou, the "Wumen School of Painting", began a peak period of ink and wash colors. While inheriting and absorbing the characteristics of previous paintings, Shen Zhou gradually established his own painting style, and developed the characteristics of Xu Xi's "falling ink and flowers" in the Five Dynasties. He integrated the techniques of landscape painting into flower-and-bird painting, often using ink and light crimson painting techniques, with rich and varied strokes and ink, as well as incorporating the Yuan people's "ink play" and light colors, By using a combination of color and ink to express objects, ink and wash elements are added to the boneless paintings that focus on color modeling, emphasizing the charm of brush and ink. The rich and layered changes in ink and wash color are innovative, and the double hook color method and ink and wash light color method are used to represent flowers and birds in the form of dots and lines, breaking the long-standing tradition of using lines in flower-and-bird paintings and opening up a new path, which not only expands the expansion of flower-and-bird paintings, At the same time, the integration of ink and color has been pushed to a new level.

Chen Chun is a disciple of Wen Huiming. His painting style tends to the style of Shen Zhou and develops it, which makes the color depth of color of ink and wash develop. In his paintings, the blending of ink and color can be seen more clearly and concretely. At this time, the relationship between ink and color has reached a true fusion, and the painter has already arranged the distance between the two.

### **3. Conclusion**

The ink wash flower-and-bird painting in the early Ming Dynasty has undergone more changes compared to before, and in the middle of the Ming Dynasty, the style of ink wash freehand brushwork and color design gradually emerged, and it also developed more commonly in the late Ming Dynasty. In the mid Ming Dynasty, the pinnacle of calligraphy and painting was mostly dominated by literati and literati. The flower-and-bird paintings of the late Ming Dynasty incorporated the "ink play" and light color design of the Yuan Dynasty. Due to the influence of Shen Zhou, the flower-and-bird paintings of the late Ming Dynasty combined the brushwork and ink techniques very well, pushing the relationship between color and ink to a new level.

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