

# A comparative study of Shuohongshu and Party Secretary and the Old and Poor Peasants

Haoping Dong

Chinese National Academy of Arts, Beijing, 100020, China

**Abstract:** “Shuohongshu” and “Party Secretary and the Old Poor Peasants” are two classic ink figure paintings in the history of modern Chinese art. They have similarities in composition, creation techniques and so on. Both of them construct the picture through the unity of opposition between the group portrait and the front figure, but there are many differences. This paper analyzes and studies the similarities and differences of their creative background and creative techniques.

**Key words:** outline; Wet pen; realistic

In the middle of the 20th century, in order to meet the needs of The Times and publicity, Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts decided to transform Chinese figure painting. The leaders of the academy selected a group of painters with excellent drawing ability to learn Chinese painting. This group of painters eventually became the backbone of Zhejiang School figure painting, among which Fang Zengxian was the best. The figure painting of Zhejiang School was born in the college. With the development and spread of teaching activities, in the process of teaching practice, painters gradually explored a modeling method that weakened light and shade and emphasized line factors, and combined it with flower-and-bird painting techniques and calligraphy pens to form a paradigm of figure painting of Zhejiang School, which was different from “Xu Jiang system” and Huang Zhou’s sketch combined with Chinese painting. In 1956, Fang Zengxi went to Shanghai to learn the brushwork interest of Shanghai School of flower-and-bird painting from Wang Zi □, and incorporated it into his own works. Around 1960, he reformed Soviet style sketch in practice, integrating the modeling method of Western painting with the traditional brushwork of Chinese flower-and-bird painting, and gradually formed an artistic appearance of long line outline and bright colors. Liu Wenxi’s early works also clearly bore the characteristics of Zhejiang School figure painting, and his personal style became more and more obvious in the later period, with the lines full of tremors and changes. He also learned from landscape painting the use of ink dots, and the formal language of dots, lines and surfaces became more and more prominent. The Branch Secretary and the Old and Poor Peasants is the early work of Liu Wenxi’s creative career, and its signature ink spots have not appeared in the painting, but the ink has different characteristics from the figure paintings of the Zhejiang School.

## 1. Contrast of brush and ink

### 1. Contrast of brushwork

Observing the brushwork in “Shuohongshu”, we can clearly see the influence of the Shanghai school of flower-and-bird painting. The baskets, crops and straw sandals around the figures on the far right can all be seen that Fang Zengxian absorbed the Shanghai school of painting. Compared with Wu Changshuo’s brushwork, which is old and reflects the stone atmosphere in the epirology, it is more close to the relaxed and graceful style of Ren Bonian’s brushwork. The clothes of the two figures in the upper left corner are colored with stone blue and stone green. The crops below are painted with boneless flowers and birds. The water color and the ink color clash with each other, reflecting a strong style of Shanghai painting. The brushwork of “Shuohongshu” has a strong traditional charm. The so-called “brush center” reflects the brushwork of “folding hairpin” and “cone painting sand” incisively and vividly. It is a representative masterpiece of Zhejiang School figure painting that integrates traditional brushwork and Western modeling methods. However, the brushwork of the Party Secretary and the Old Poor Peasants contains more personal exploration interest. During this period, Liu Wenxi’s brushwork was characterized by thick, rough and forthrightly, which gradually reflected the style of the change from Zhejiang School figure painting to loess School. The straw hat in the lower right corner of the picture was almost painted with a pen root, with a broken edge and a penetrating force, and the ink color change from the pen tip to the pen root can be clearly seen. This is rarely seen in the traditional brushwork. Compared with Shuohongshu, the brushwork of the Party Secretary and the Old Poor Peasants has fewer twists and turns. Each stroke basically goes in a straight line, which is especially obvious in the two characters in the middle. No matter the thickness of the lines or the color of the ink, the brushwork is straight, while the changes of the lines on the Party secretary wearing an octagonal hat in the front are relatively more abundant. Reflecting the author’s ingenious conception of distinguishing characters with different brushstrokes. Similarly, in the famous painting “Four Generations of Ancestors and Grandchildren”, Liu Wenxi also uses different brushwork to distinguish the characters. The top two figures are represented by the trademark straight strokes of this period, and the little girl and flowers on the right side of the picture are carefully sketched with the tip of the pen.

### 2. Contrast of ink style

In the use of ink, “ShuoHongshu” a large area of the use of light ink, the use of light ink to the left back six figures formed a gray mass, and corresponding to the front of the picture said red book characters in white clothes, black pants, formed a stronger contrast, with the strength of the contrast to open the spatial relationship of the picture. The skeleton of the picture of “Party Secretary and the Old and poor peasants” is built by dry pen and thick ink, and then slightly light ink and color are used to separate and dye, opening the space before and after the picture. In order to distinguish the front and back characters, the lower body of the figure above the party secretary has been blurred.

The two works can achieve such a high artistic achievement only by choosing the appropriate expression of brush and ink. Mastering brush and ink is an indispensable ability of Chinese painters and also a lifelong cultivation. It is the language essence of Chinese painting, a national art, that distinguishes it from other kinds of painting.

## 2. Line and shape

### 1. Use of lines

“Say Red Book” is the use of Zhejiang school representative of the long line outline, to the front of the characters, for example, the shoulders of the white cloth on the chest, a head hanging on the ground, outline the lines of the white cloth combined, from beginning to end. The modeling method of “Say Red Book” is extremely generalized, taking the side figure on the far right as an example, the back of the figure is summarized into two lines superimposing each other. In the “Party Secretary and the Old Poor Peasants” with similar angles, the lines are relatively complicated, the entire back has about 4-5 turns, the external edge line is also dyed with light ink, and the ink is more complicated. In addition, the two works in the clothing pattern, hand lines also have their own merits, “Shuohongshu” hand treatment is more agile, different shapes, vivid and specific performance of the character’s hand muscle circle relationship, pay more attention to the processing of the edge line, so that the picture active without jumping. In the work “Party Secretary and the Old and Poor Peasants”, the hands use more short lines, and the lines are relatively more parallel and the turns are more square. The depiction of nails, fingerprints, bone points and veins is more specific, and it is more suitable for the identity of the figure’s workers. Summary and concision are Fang Zengxian’s artistic characteristics. He pays more attention to the dynamic force and edge shape of the figure. In order to ensure the connection of pen and ink, he basically summarizes only two or three lines at the turn of a garment pattern. It does not conflict with the overall concise style. Compared with Shuohongshu, the Party Secretary and the Old and Poor Peasants have a clearer relationship of thin and dense lines. The five features and hands of the characters are thin and dense, while the torso and clothes are thick and sparse. Short lines are used for the parts of the character’s head and hands, and the character’s beard is also composed of short lines rather than boneless painting. Long lines are more common in the torso of the character, and the turning point is also more square. Taking the two characters on the left as an example, the headscarf, face, front chest, forearm and hand of the front character constitute a thin, dense, thin, dense relationship, and then through the thin straw hat in the back set off the dense face, and the dense clothing in the back set off the thin chest, forming a strong contrast that can be thin and tight, and also reflects the author’s clever thinking about the use of lines. There are more conflict factors between the lines, whether it is the straight modeling method or the occasional parallel line relationship, they are very much in line with the painter’s brush and ink, forming the amiable and respectable image of honest farmers in the picture.

### 2. Modeling method

In terms of modeling, it can be seen that both works draw on the modeling method of Western figurative painting, extract the proportion and human body structure from it, and weaken the factors of light and shadow. It is a unique modeling method born in practice, and it is a combination of Chinese painting language and Western modeling language. The long line shape of Shuohongshu reflects the artist’s reference and induction of the figure. When drawing the edge line of the head, all the small ups and downs are abandoned, but the key structures such as the parietal bone, temporal bone, cheekbone, orbicularis orbicularis muscle and mandible are depicted in place, and the expression structure is interspersed with the superposition of the lines. At the same time has its own general treatment, “Party Secretary and the old poor peasants” uses short line, straight line wrinkle to wipe to shape the characters, the characters in the image of both objective realism and can see the painter’s subjective distinction, several farmers in northern Shaanxi both in line with our concept of the image of the impression, but also have their own distinct characteristics, The two middle-aged images on the left side of the picture through the straw hat and headscarf of these two different costumes, clearly distinguish the character’s silhouette type, the image of the branch secretary is on the side, from the form and the back of several characters to make a distinction, the side characters can also show part of the character’s expression and appearance characteristics. In the whole picture, the detailed lines are concentrated on the head and hands, which shows that the artist’s modeling logic is that the prominent position needs more ink and brush, while the clothes and scenes should be simplified to distinguish the rhythm. The depiction of hands in “Party Secretary and the Old and Poor Peasants” is more solid than that in “Shuohongshu”, and the proportion is slightly exaggerated. As the second face of the laborer, the hard and exaggerated shape of the hands better suits the identity of the characters. Shuohongshu is a representative work of Zhejiang School figure painting. Besides the five facial features, Shuohongshu has little wrinkle method and uses less wrinkle method to outline the faces with long lines and colorful points □. On the other hand, the Branch Secretary and the Old Poor Peasants has some characteristics of northern ink figure painting, with lots of short lines on the faces and hands, and more brushwork is put into the treatment of the border lines and decorative lines. The modeling method of ShuoHongshu is highly skilled and subtle, while the modeling method of ShuoHongshu and the Old Poor Peasants is more simple and sincere. The meticulous shaping in “Party Secretary and the Old Poor Peasants” makes the characters more appropriate and vivid. The picture revolves around the theme of serving the people in terms of color and composition. Vivid expressions and body language reflect and convey the eagerness and affinity of cadres to serve the people, and sincere ink and ink bring true feelings to this eager atmosphere. The so-called “all scenery and words are feelings”, the abstract ink symbols in the background are also like booming crops. It plays a role in setting off the atmosphere of the picture. From the perspective of processing techniques, “Party Secretary and the Old Poor Peasants” is Liu Wenxi’s work in the transition period from the Zhejiang School figure painting style to the loess painting School, while “Shuohongshu” is the output of Fang Zengxian’s mature artistic style. The composition, color and ink of the two have certain similarities. In terms of technical maturity, ShuoHongshu is superior. The combination of pen and ink with shape, the induction of figure images, and the blending of water and ink

have reached the peak since the birth of ink and ink figure painting. However, it cannot be arbitrarily considered that the Branch Secretary and the Old Poor Peasants cannot be compared with Liu Wenxi in terms of artistic achievements. The early works of ink figure subject, with a certain exploration, also reflects the Zhejiang school of figure painting spread and change in the country.

By comparing the two works, it can be concluded that excellent works are highly unified in form and content. "Shuohongshu" uses sophisticated strokes and shapes to easily express the scene of artistic performance. The blank space of the picture has the meaning of "vast world and great achievements". The Party Secretary and the Old and Poor Peasants describes the communication between the government and the people with heavy and simple manual rules. The compact space of the picture reflects the close cooperation and intimate relationship between the characters of "from the masses to the masses". Both works choose the most appropriate means to convey the spirit and emotion of the characters. Therefore, both works can become the classic works in the history of Chinese figure painting. Through the longitudinal comparison, it can be found that artistic creation is not a simple movement that rises straight with the passage of time and the maturity of techniques, but an organic combination of technology and the content expressed. The birth of good works must be a solid theoretical and practical foundation, but also need keen feelings, appropriate techniques, and even the occasional creation theme, or the simplicity and piety contained in the pen and ink, which suggests that creators should devote more energy to observation. Zhejiang School figure painting provides a reference for people's creative techniques. Fang Zengxian et al developed it into a new style of painting with long lines and water color points □, and Liu Wenxi transformed it into a loud and bright artistic chapter of the people of northern Shaanxi. With the advance of The Times, people's ideas, spiritual outlook and dress will inevitably change. Faced with the explosion of information and the deepening exploration of human nature, there will be a distance between today's Chinese painting and the works of the 1960s. The change of expression techniques will also lead to the controversy of "Chinese" or "Western", but as a figure painter, it is not entangled in the system that he can open up a new situation of figure painting. The creation of Fang Zengxian and Liu Wenxi has thus opened up the road for later generations of painters.

### References:

- [1] Xiao Liu. A New Chinese Figure Painting in a New Way -- Fang Zengxian's "Saying the Red Book" [J]. Art Market, 2021, 000(011):P.16-17.
- [2] Yuan Feng. A Hundred Thoughts of My Teacher -- in memory of my teacher Fang Zengxian [J]. Books and Paintings, 2020, 000(004):P.70-75.
- [3] Baohui Zhu. On People's Artist Liu Wenxi [J]. Fine Arts, 2022(2):10.
- [4] Yue Jiang. My Opinion on the Figure painting of Zhejiang School [J]. Art Market, 2021, 000(002):P.127-129.