

# Introduction of “Eight Broken” Painting

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**Abstract**—“Eight broken” is a kind of special pattern in the long history of Chinese painting, not subject to any one of the traditional Chinese paintings classification, such as the painting of landscapes, flowers and birds, figures and so on. It integrates textology, antique, super realism, collage art, and many other tags. The rise and continuation of it, and the current endangered situation has its special social and historical background, and it also reflects the Chinese painters’ aesthetic temperament and interest in a certain historical stage, research mentality and the change of knowledge structure. The new aesthetic experience it provides for us have changed, it greatly expands the visual meaning in the two-dimensional space of the painting, and it has important value signification in painting history, especially for modern and contemporary art.

**Keywords**—epigraphy; incomplete beauty; hyper-realistic; collage

## I. INTRODUCTION

“Eight broken” is also called “accumulated ancient things” “Fig. 1”. “Accumulated wealth”, “Assorted pictures”, “Jin Hui Dui” “Upset waste-paper basket” and so on. As a very special painting style, it began in the end of the 19th century and kept a very prosperous condition till the first half of 20th century. It was painted on the snuff bottles, ceramics, jewelry box, and even billboard. For the “Eight broken”, the word “eight” is a function word, means a lot, wealthy and power; “Broken” means the old and incomplete things; furthermore, in Chinese culture, it implies “Cherishing the things even if it is broken and out of fashion”, “the Old possessions is worth a lot”. “Eight broken” painting mostly takes broken paper residue and stone rubbings for depicting its object, covering and combining the old appearance that was fired, smoked, ruptured and twisting, expressed by a realistic way, showing a feature of “not but better than a real book, not but better than a real painting”. It looked primitive and elegant, very interesting, and is quite favored by scholars. It is recorded in the “Biography of Jianshui - Figure” during the period of the Republic of China (1912-1949) that people in the Qing dynasty like to paint the ruptured and twisting appearance of stationery, copying a variety of fonts on it, in very image. In the beginning, these contents are only depicted on the folding fan, numerous people want to buy it for collection, after that the contents were gradually only draw on the pottery, and soon became popular.

## II. THE HISTORY AND AESTHETIC CHARACTERISTICS OF “EIGHT BROKEN” PAINTING

### A. The origin of the “eight broken” painting

The earliest pattern of “Jin Hui Dui” appeared on snuff bottle in the Ming dynasty, but the word of “Jin Hui Dui” appeared in the Yuan dynasty. The famous painter Qian Xuan had painted the “Jin Hui Dui”, which described the scattered food on the table, such as crab legs, mussel, lotus seed pot, chicken feather, fish bones, etc. This is likely to be the earliest historical records about “Jin Hui Dui”. We can infer that “Jin Hui Dui” maybe is the earliest name of “Eight broken”, but according to the basic characteristics of “eight broken”, Qian Xuan’s painting obviously did not conform to it. Perhaps after the development and evolvement, it gradually changed until it became mature, and then the subjects and methods of “eight broken” painting gradually formed, but people still use the nickname “Jin Hui Dui” to call it.



Fig. 1. Yang Wei-quan’s “Eight broken” painting

Since the ancient, Chinese painting artists were interested in the stationery on desk, so books and rubbings have often been used to show the painting. During the 17th and 18th centuries, many woodcut paintings following the subject of "the ancient artifact" were imitated on the stone rubbings, or flowers and birds were drawn on rubbings. From the themes of old things, Ruyi, auspicious kinds, we can find that in the picture, the composition of stack type is very similar with the "Eight broken" painting. Some characteristics of "Eight broken" painting are similar with "old things" painting, maybe affected by "Old things" in certain extent, and all the items in the typical "eight broken" painting have their source and basis, which should be due to the Renaissance of textology. During the Qing dynasty, the rulers curbed the folk revolution ideology and hid their ignominious history, in order to consolidate their regime. Some of the successive emperors implemented the "literary inquisition" to control the intellectuals. Just because of a word, the intellectuals were often punished by the government, so they dare not talk about the regime, but put their attention to the stone table and ancient books. These promote the development of textology greatly. During that period, the custom of studying ancient rules became the intellectual's capital to splurge knowledge, which was very popular. Some arty merchants and citizens purchased "eight broken" painting in succession for interior decoration or collection. So that it is not hard to understand why the "eight broken" painting originated in the Yuan dynasty but prospered in the Ming dynasty.

#### *B. The spread of realistic techniques promoted the formation of the "eight broken" painting*

"Eight broken" painting requires the authors should have profound knowledge about inscriptions, proficient in all kinds of painting skills, qualified for calligraphy and should also be good at drawing flowers and birds, landscapes, figures, and comic. The artists should be good at imitating all kinds of painting styles to make sure of lifelike image, and have excellent ability in sketch and realistic painting. It presents very strict requirements about the painters' traditional Chinese painting skill, and also benefits the promotion of western painting in the China. During the late 16th century, Italian missionary Matteo Ricci came to China, brought the western painting skill, and during his missionary process, he also influenced the Chinese traditional painting. After the Qing dynasty, missionary activities gradually transformed into a work for the art in palace from the sermon preached. Because the emperor did not like the western religion but the art of praise, and at that time in the palace, the western missionaries, painter, academician painter (imperial palace civilian), and the court painter (professional painters) formed a tripartite confrontation. These artists getting into the court not only showed their western oil painting to the Qing dynasty emperor, for catering to the Oriental aesthetic habit, but also they studied Chinese traditional painting skills actively and created the arts with their methods by blending of Chinese and western painting skills. The Italian painter Lang Shining, who got into the palace in the period of Kangxi reign, had lived engaged in painting for more than fifty years in China through three dynasties: Kangxi, Yongzheng and Qianlong, during which,

he created a large number of works of art "Fig. 2". In his paintings, Lang Shining introduced the western-style modeling method based on the natural science and the realistic techniques into Chinese painting creation, and he combined with the characteristics of traditional Chinese elaborate-style painting in his work, which deeply influenced the tradition of Chinese painting built from the Tang to Song dynasties. His paintings was greatly affirmed at that time, and even for today's Chinese painting, his creation has a great value for reference and study; in the folk, the western missionaries preached doctrine by engraving to meet their missionary need, attracting more Chinese people. This should be the former painting popularization and education for the general public in China. In 18th century, the coastal areas of Guangdong began to presented commercial paintings for export to Europe, so as to meet the demand of foreign customers, among which, some works have obvious characteristics of western painting besides the traditional Chinese style. In the 19th century, western painting spread rapidly in the folk, and even a Chinese man named spoilum (transliterated as Shi Beilin, and someone guessed the Chinese name was Guan Zuolin according to historical information) appeared in Guangzhou. Artists studied western painting skills from copying oil painting. Painter, and some orphans accepted professional training in the technology field of church. This provides a great foundation for the appearance of "eight broken" and the following commercial paintings and Shanghai's New-year Painting with Calendar.



Fig. 2. Lang Shining's painting "Qianlong In Uniform"

### C. *The aesthetic characteristics of "Eight broken" painting*

Different from other types of painting, the object depicted by "eight broken" painting has high independent aesthetic value. As one being of the double visual impression, the information presented by it reflects the artist's knowledge and life experience. Occasionally, partial picture in the painting present another new space, and the key place was intentionally or unintentionally "burnt," "torn" by artists when the appreciators are carefully watching, leaving people a feeling of "it's a secret that shouldn't be told". This aesthetics attitude to intentionally pursue the broken and ancient is not common in other dynasties, expressing an aesthetic view about imperfection, and it is a special form of aesthetic category. As early as in the Pre-Qin dynasty, people used the "words explained the thought hardly accurately" to express the beauty of imperfection. Laoze advocated "The real perfect with a little defect". Imperfection is relative to the case of gestalt, visual imperfection makes people seek psychological gestalt and pursue the natural things, while this imperfect is often beautiful. Blank in the calligraphy, remnant edge of seal cutting, even the "Mayuan and Xiaguis" type of composition, the visual impression of ancient murals after wind erosion reflect the aesthetic characteristics of "imperfection beauty", and the form of imperfection make it more perfect.

All the pages of "Eight broken" painting seem fired and smoked, old and damaged, very realistic, which makes people appreciate the visual impression created by the painters with super realistic skills. It helps people to think of what happened about these pieces of paper? Actually, these just reflect the truth of the social situation at that time. During the late 19th century, China began to enter a stormy time, western powers invading, civil war breaking out everywhere. China suffered from war too much, full of debris from royal gardens to ordinary residences. The land in deep cultural atmosphere was devastated at this time. As the symbol of the "sage's words" that was treated as treasure by the intellectuals, the calligraphies and paintings were badly treated, and there were only some pieces of paper left. By seeing this, the intellectuals were deeply hurt, and even a piece of fragments was cherished very much. Different social reality provides people with different visual experience, which naturally triggered the corresponding aesthetic feeling, so a special period may even give their own unique cultural symbols. As the Shanghai New-year Painting with Calendar makes people recall the memories of old Shanghai, and the Big-character posters are reminiscent of the cultural revolution, "Eight broken" painting, whether for its drawing technique of combining Chinese and western styles or its reflection on the reality of society and history, can be called China's cultural symbol in a special stage, and also the historical memory of an era.

### III. THE VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL COMPARISON OF "EIGHT BROKEN" PAINTING AND ITS EVOLUTION

"Eight broken" painting have high requirements for the artists, coupled with the long creation period and the large market demand, so it then became a craftsmanship gradually,

and artisans used it for making a living. In the middle and late 20th century, many "Eight broken" paintings in Shanghai were painted by the artisans in accordance with the customers' requirements. The ancient symbols in the picture were instead for each piece of paper with any words. "Eight broken" painting declined from elite culture to common culture. The aesthetic value is in a state of depreciation. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, a few of masters good at the "Eight broken" painting, such as Zheng Dafu, Song Yiqing are too old to work, they cannot continued painting any longer, and the "Eight broken" were almost lost. There are still some folk artists producing "Eight broken" painting, the fine art teaching is introduced from the western countries and the traditional art is inherited and developed greatly, providing a good condition, but the change of social background, artistic ideological trend, market demand and artist's creative spirit orientation results into the gradual disappearance of "Eight broken". Like many disappeared art forms in the history, our inheritance and research on it is not for repeating it, but the reuse of its content and the introduction of new proposition and motivation will lead to the discussion on a more meaningful and interesting space. Actually, many art forms have its own timeliness and regional situation and they are "unique" in the long history. For the research of them, we can only stay in a closed periodic state, but for most art forms, we all can find similar style to have a comprehensive research at a certain period and certain region, and this similar style can be in a conscious state and can also happen in an unconscious state.

At the beginning of the 20th century, a kind of "collage" type of modern art appeared in the western countries, and the artist collaged the paper, cloth or other materials on a two-dimensional plane material to create a new visual style. In 1912, Picasso created the first collage works in the world, he pasted a paper printed with cany chair on the canva, instead of the method of brush painting. After the World War I, Dadaists developed this art style, more and more diversifications happened, including the color and the texture, with different technique and material more diversified. This affected the form and concept of artistic creation from the 20th century till nowadays. Some Western art scholars think that the creative inspiration of "collage art" might come from the China's "Eight broken" in the 19th century, but according to the research of Wan Qingli, this is likely to be "a misunderstanding", even though it is reasonable for the time of it. In the 19th century, the European merchants and Chinese people had a lot of commodity trading about china's painting in the coastal areas of China's Guangdong, and the style of "Eight broken" painting may be exported overseas at that time. But judging only from the two points, without very exact evidence, it makes us suspected of "chauvinism". There are certain differences between "Eight broken" painting and collage art after comparing them. First, they both adopt the artistic methods of stacking and overlapping different visual material together, but the former is hand-painted with representational realism while the latter is just pasted. Second, in pursuit of the aesthetic characteristics of ancient and old, "Eight broken" painting often has "fired" mark; Third, a typical "eight broken" painting has a



relatively fixed type of object to depict, but collage art is free from this.

"Eight broken" painting was no longer popular after the end of the 20th century, but its style and the aesthetic connotation provided some valuable information for the modern and contemporary art. Some the of technique elements of the "Eight broken" painting can be seen from many artists' works, and different visual impressing with new faces and meanings were created by artists in their individual spirits and expressive desires. For example, the works of art named "Relics" "Fig. 3", a traditional Chinese realistic painting, was painted by contemporary traditional Chinese artist Jiang Zhongchao who was from Hubei. In the painting, the creator painted a fragment of Song dynasty painting, stacking with a marked letter paper on a broken wall that is full of graffiti about the ideological mainstream in the special historical stage. The intermittent text collaged with the Song dynasty painting that is the classic culture of China, easily making people reminiscent of the Cultural Revolution in China in 1966-1976, and it seems to be recounting the decade of havoc about Chinese culture in the painting vocabulary. On the top of the wall, it looked like some arithmetic questions written by pupils and some English letters, the immature chalk mark seems to give the turbulent era a seed of hope: as long as the Chinese people still thrive, our culture will get renaissance and continuation even if there is only one piece of paper about culture. Painting language has a certain ambiguity, but just its ambiguity brings us more information. Just like "Eight broken" painting, the "Relics" takes the items with characteristics of era as its describing objects, with the mottled texture of metope and the elements' stacking made by the same technique. Furthermore, the sense of history made deliberately has some features of trace discipline. Besides the virtual 3D visual impression, the painting likely provides us a coordinates of the time, and it's meaningful.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The development of "Eight broken" paintings and its current situation of almost disappearing have its own rules. Like the research of other art styles, our purpose is to get the experience of this painting style. Is it necessary to date back to that time for repeating it? I think it is unnecessary. Nowadays art is diversified and we experience all kinds of deconstruction, composition, reconstruction of materials, methods and concepts, and more and more art styles will attract us. At this time, just gazing at the ancient will make us ignore more contemporary history. As the research on art history is continued, there will be more and more new historical materials, like the depicting objects of "Eight broken" painting, provided for the creator to choose according to their need, but the visual experience they give us will be integrated into our entire civilization, to guide us constantly writing a new history.

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Fig. 3. Jiang Zhongchao's painting "Relics"