

From Scroll to Screen: Visual Culture and the Narrative Turn in East Asian Art

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Abstract: The article is the discussion on the shift of the East Asian traditional art in the media (from scroll to screens) and the narrative turn of the East Asian art during the changing of the visual culture. It is an analysis of the temporal and spatial nature of scroll art in conjunction with the digital activity of the Palace Museum and the Dunhuang Academy to discuss and evaluate the impact of screen media on the narrative structure, channel of dissemination, and audience reception of art. Research has shown that media changes have driven traditional art narratives to shift from linear time series to multidimensional spatiotemporal presentation, and appreciation modes have shifted from niche appreciation among elite circles to mass immersive experiences. Static image-based interpretation has gradually shifted to dynamic and interactive narratives. In the digital communication environment, contemporary innovation of traditional art should adhere to the cultural core and optimize narrative expression through digital technology. This study offers insights for the digital inheritance and innovative development of East Asian art, helping integrate traditional artistic spirit with modern media forms.

Keywords: Visual culture; East Asian art; Narrative Turn; Media transition; Digital Technology.

1. Introduction

Scrolls are the core carrier of East Asian art, with a unique logic of unfolding time through scroll-viewing and structuring spatial narrative, with a thousand-year-old visual narrative tradition. From Wang Ximeng's "A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains" to Japan's "The Tale of Genji", Scroll art is appreciated through hand-scroll viewing, integrating time and space to form a cohesive narrative system of "poetry, books, paintings, and seals" coexisting, and also constructing a multiple - perspective mode that is different from Western focal perspectives.

This "changing scenery" viewing method requires the viewer to construct time and space by gradually unrolling and rewinding the scroll, making the aesthetic experience both physical and thoughtful. Digitization and screen media popularization has brought about a significant shift in the narrative of East Asian art. The traditional method of presenting scrolls has slowly evolved into screen interaction and art distribution has extended beyond private desk viewing to a public digital space [1].

Over the past few years, there have been initiatives like the Palace Museum app, The Night Revels of Han Xizai, and the Dunhuang VR cave, Exploring Dunhuang, which have brought the traditional art out of display cabinets into the screens, and have turned the static viewing into dynamic interaction. It was launched to the App Store on its launch day, and the app has annual downloads of over 300,000. In December 2015, it was listed as one of Apple's Best Apps of the Year which can be attributed to the empowering nature of digital storytelling in the spread of traditional art.

Digitalization in cultural and museum organizations has shown that digital media can eliminate barriers to watching and let valuable collections come out of their physical constraints to be seen by people. Such a shift has not merely transformed the form of art presentation, it has also altered the logic of the narrative, the path of its distribution, and the cultural values, which is why academic studies are inspired. This article takes this as the research object, analyzes its

internal mechanism and practical problems, and provides ideas for the digital inheritance and innovation of East Asian art.

2. The Spatiotemporal Structure and Visual Logic of Scroll Narrative

The East Asian scroll art, with its unique temporal and spatial construction, has formed a narrative tradition distinct from Western art, which is mainly reflected in the dual dimensions of visual expression and cultural connotation. The handscroll has a horizontal unfolding as its core form, naturally forming a linear temporal sequence of "changing scenery with each step". The hanging scroll, on the other hand, creates a sense of spatial hierarchy of "high distance, profound depth, and flat distance" with its vertical hanging feature. Together, they carry the spatial aesthetic concept of "Three Distances Method" in Guo Xis "Lin Quan Gao Zhi" of the Northern Song Dynasty, and also contain the philosophical core of "unity of heaven and man" in East Asian culture. The "A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains" created by Wang Ximeng of the Northern Song Dynasty in 1113, with a total length of 11.9 meters, presents the majestic landscape of the Northern Song Dynasty in a panoramic composition. Viewers need to gradually browse the scroll from right to left, completing the time and space dimension through the linkage of body movements and visual experiences. This deep binding of linear narrative and physical movements endows traditional art appreciation with a strong sense of ceremony and completeness.

The core characteristic of scroll narrative lies in the implicit expression centered on blank space and suggestion. The composition principle of "Treating valuing blank space as integral composition" runs through it, and its core is not simply blank space in the picture, but guiding viewers to actively participate in the construction of narrative meaning through blank space design. Gu Hongzhongs "The Night Revels of Han Xizai" depicts the entire process of the banquet in five paragraphs: listening to music, watching dance, taking

a break, blowing, and dispersing the banquet. The scenes are naturally transitioned and separated by blank spaces and screens, ensuring narrative coherence and leaving ample room for imagination for viewers, thus creating a narrative tension of "meaning conveyed beyond brushstrokes". At the same time, the organic integration of poetry, books, paintings, and seals has enabled scrolls to break through the limitations of a single images meaning, becoming a comprehensive narrative carrier of mutual interpretation and diverse coexistence of graphics and text, gradually constructing a rich cultural meaning network, and demonstrating the comprehensive aesthetic characteristics of East Asian art [2].

In terms of dissemination forms, ancient scrolls were mostly kept exclusively by the court and literati, and were only circulated for viewing and entertainment within a niche elite circle, and were not open to the general public [3]. This private and elite dissemination feature objectively limits the breadth of art popularization, but effectively preserving the refined cultural identity and complete narrative context of scroll art, maintaining the aesthetic purity of traditional art and ultimately becoming the core medium that carries the aesthetic spirit and humanistic concepts of East Asia, continuing and transmitting the unique cultural heritage and cultural core of Eastern art.

3. The technological reconfiguration of East Asian art narrative through screen media

The screen media, relying on its own technological characteristics, breaks through the physical boundaries of scroll art and reconstructs the narrative logic of East Asian art. Digital screens' high-definition display and real-time interaction improve the presentation and dissemination of traditional art. The digital exhibition of "Thousand Miles of Rivers and Mountains" utilizes 8K ultra high definition digital technology to achieve high-precision magnification of the image. During the viewing process, the audience can clearly distinguish the particle texture of mineral pigments such as malachite and turquoise, and see the details of the brushwork. This delicate visual experience cannot be achieved by traditional exhibition viewing methods, and it also makes the presentation of traditional art more layered.

The screen media breaks the inherent linear temporal narrative sequence of scroll art, breaking it down into interactive nodes that can be freely jumped. The Palace Museums "The Night Revels of Han Xizai" digital APP supports viewers to click on elements such as characters and objects in the picture, triggering dynamic interpretation and cultural and historical interpretation of the corresponding scene, transforming traditional one-way visual browsing into an interactive narrative mode that viewers can choose independently. Deep learning algorithms can accurately replicate the texture and color charm of traditional calligraphy and painting, generating dynamic visual effects that fit the original temperament. During the Hangzhou Asian Games, Chen Xiaos "Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains (New Version)" was dynamically presented at a high frame rate on the main media wall, fully realizing the digital translation and contemporary expression of traditional calligraphy and painting charm.

VR technology has built immersive 3D viewing scenes for East Asian art storytelling. Dunhuang Academy has completed the digital restoration of the Cave 285 mural in

Mogao Grottoes through high-precision 3D modeling, and launched an exclusive VR cave experience project, allowing viewers to immerse themselves in the mural space and engage in interactive viewing with various mural images, extending the narrative of flat paintings and calligraphy from two-dimensional images to three-dimensional space [4]. The integration of multimedia means such as sound, light, and electricity on the screen media has equipped the dynamic version of "Along the River During Qingming Festival" with highly realistic Northern Song Dynasty urban environment sound effects, achieving a comprehensive upgrade of artistic narrative from a single visual experience to a multi sensory immersive experience [5]. This not only conforms to the media reception habits of contemporary audiences, but also provides a new path for the contemporary inheritance of traditional art.

4. Changes in the Relationship between narrative creator and Audience in the Transformation of Visual Culture

The iterative updating of media has profoundly reshaped the relationship pattern between narrative creators and audiences in the field of East Asian art, and has also promoted the gradual shift of artistic narrative from the traditional "author centered" paradigm to a more interactive "audience participation" model [6]. In the creation and dissemination system of traditional scroll art, literati painters always occupy the core position of narrative. They use brush and ink as a medium to express personal emotions and convey unique cultural ideals, thus forming an elite narrative form of "using painting to express personal ideals". In this context, the audience is mostly in a passive receiving position and often needs to have a profound cultural accumulation and professional artistic appreciation skills in order to truly understand the deep narrative connotations of "the image beyond the image and the charm beyond the rhyme" in scroll works.

The widespread popularity of digital technology has provided unprecedented narrative participation space for ordinary audiences and broken the one-way communication barriers of traditional art. The "UKIYO-E VISIONS" digital exhibition launched by the Shanghai World Expo Museum in 2024, relying on AR interactive technology, allows visitors to integrate the classic wave elements of Katsushika Hokusais "The Great Wave off Kanagawa" with real-life scenes, independently completing personalized artistic narrative creations, truly realizing the core transformation from passive viewing to active participation [7].

The multiplicity of the people who create stories is another significant characteristic of this visual cultural revolution. The narrative community of East Asian art in the digital age is made up of professional artists, technology developers, and regular audiences all. An immersive experience zone named Light and Shadow: Classic Chinese Paintings created by the Hebei Museum according to the Hebei Special Exhibition of Chinese Historical Painting Series, Flourishing Age Compilation: The Grand Collection of Chinese Historical Paintings - Hebei Special Exhibition of Chinese Historical Painting Series in 2024 is offered with strict academic direction by historians to guarantee the historical genuineness of the content. The technical team completes the digital activation and presentation of ancient paintings through 3D

modeling and interactive design, and the audience can independently choose their viewing path and narrative focus in the interactive experience. This digital section not only attracts a large number of young visitors to the museum, but also effectively lowers the threshold for appreciating traditional art, allowing East Asian art narratives to gradually step out of the niche elite circle and truly integrate into the field of popular culture. It also opens up a broader practical path for the contemporary revitalization and long-term inheritance of traditional art.

5. Cross-media Practice of East Asian Art Narrative Driven by Digital Technology

The rapid development of digital technology is continuously driving East Asian art narrative to break through the limitations of traditional single media and gradually form a cross-media practice form that deeply integrates multiple platforms and forms. In this process, contemporary artists from China, Japan, and South Korea have rooted themselves in their local cultural foundations, relied on digital creative methods, seamlessly integrated traditional aesthetic elements into contemporary art creation, and effectively explored the modernization transformation and international dissemination path of Eastern artistic spirit. In 2022, the "Refocusing Media: The Rise of East Asian Video Art" exhibition held by Beijing Minsheng Modern Art Museum showcased 31 cross-media works by 17 Chinese, Japanese, and Korean artists, clearly presenting the complete narrative context of East Asian arts transformation from traditional carriers such as scrolls and screens to modern media such as video and digital images. It has become a typical representative case of cross-media art practice in the region.

The gaming industry, as an emerging medium of communication, provides an effective path for the contemporary transformation of traditional artistic narratives [8]. In the design of relevant content of Genshin Impact, Yunhan Society deeply integrates classical aesthetic elements such as Chinese traditional calligraphy, ink landscape, etc., relies on the open world virtual scene to build and immersive task system, so that players can intuitively experience the cultural connotation and artistic value of pen and ink creation in the process of interactive experience, completely changes the communication mode of one-way viewing of traditional art, and effectively promotes traditional aesthetics to go out of the small circle and into the mass group with a young and interactive communication mode.

The adaptation of animation has given traditional scroll art a new dynamic narrative form, realizing the contemporary revitalization of traditional art. The digital animation work based on Gu Kaizhi's masterpiece "Ode to the Goddess of the Luo River" transforms the originally static long scroll painting into a continuous and complete dynamic narrative. Through scientific storyboarding design and color reconstruction that conforms to the essence of the original work, it further strengthens the visual expression and artistic appeal of the work, effectively enhancing the attention and identification of young people with traditional scroll art. On the other hand, cross-media storytelling has significantly expanded the international dissemination path of East Asian art. The immersive digital exhibition "Fantasy Ukiyo-e", which will be exhibited in Shanghai in 2024, utilizes 360 degree digital interactive technology to accurately present

450 classic works of ukiyo-e, activating traditional art resources with digital technology and attracting many audiences to attend and interact with the exhibition. Digital media has become an important carrier for connecting East Asian cultures and promoting cross-border exchanges [9].

6. The Protection and Innovative Development of Traditional Art in the Shift of Visual Culture

The popularization of digital means has not only reshaped the narrative expression system of East Asian art, but also opened up a new path for the preservation and contemporary development of traditional art. The digital collection and archiving of cultural relics, as an important direction for global cultural heritage protection, has been widely applied in the practice of East Asian art conservation. The Digital Dunhuang in China adopts high-precision 3D scanning technology to systematically collect data on various murals and sculpture remains in the Mogao Grottoes, and build a permanent digital resource library, providing accurate data basis for mural restoration and academic research. With the help of artificial intelligence algorithms and hyperspectral analysis technology, Dunhuang Academy has completed the digital restoration of the murals in Cave 285 of Mogao Grottoes, accurately determining the composition and original color tone of the mineral pigments used in the murals, allowing the artistic style of the millennium murals to be presented intuitively [10].

In the innovative narrative of traditional art, the application of technology must always be subordinate to cultural authenticity, which is particularly crucial. It is necessary to do a good job in digital expression while also taking into account the authenticity of art. The digital exhibition project created by the Palace Museum for the collection of "Treasures of the Stone Canal Pavilion" always takes the restoration of the original work as the core principle. In line with the high-definition display of calligraphy and painting details, it extends the way of presenting the traditional hand scroll exhibition. The visitors have the opportunity to experience the procedure of hand scroll opening at interactive terminals, thus, they get to understand that traditional exhibition experience and digital technology are organically combined. It also indicates that the populace has acknowledged the cultural value of original art.

Digital platforms also afford new opportunities when it comes to the intergenerational transfer of traditional art. Some museums in Japan use digital interactive technologies to educate about ukiyo-e art. By means of the examples of digital reproduction and appreciation, they educate youth regarding the artistic methods and stylistic features of ukiyo-e art, and encourage the dissemination of traditional artistic abilities. Nevertheless, one should add that other digital transformations are overemphasizing visual qualities, which wash out cultural meanings and spirituality of the original artwork, and make the artistic story rather shallow [11]. As an answer to this situation, the Shanghai Museum, together with universities and technology corporations, has established a multi-party partnership structure in order to harness the power of both academic research to manage the cultural essence and digital technology to enhance display forms, and thus guarantee the academic integrity and cultural richness of conventional art through digital storytelling.

7. Conclusion

To sum up, the media development of scrolls into screens is not just a change in the format of representations, but a radical novelty of the narrative system of East Asian art within the sphere of visual culture. The main point here is the reorganization of old narrative logic through digital technology. In practice, digital technology has dismantled the linear time/space constraints of the scroll age (as illustrated by the cases of the Digital Dunhuang and the Palace Museum Digital App) and resulted in the threefold mutation of the East Asian art narrative: instead of linear time-stream narrative becomes a multidimensional time-space superposition; instead of elite taste consumption, mass immersion experience emerges; and instead of passive analysis of texts, active interaction generation occurs.

The practice demonstrated how technologies can empower in a very significant extent the limits of the tradition art distribution. Digital Dunhuang has collected with high precision 300 caves according to Dunhuang Academy and its VR experience enables the audience around the world to view these caves in a convenient manner and feel their mural aesthetic; Digital Palace Museum has already recorded more than 1 billion visits, which are much greater than those of any physical exhibition in China. Meanwhile, the dynamics between the narrator and the audience have taken a drastic turn, which has facilitated the movement of East Asian art towards multi-party co-creation (or de-centering the artist). Inter media activities have been able to incorporate traditional art into popular industries like games and animation and thus successfully draw the attention of the young.

Nonetheless, we should be alert to the possibility that there is a danger of overreaching in technological terms, in which case certain digital adaptations are too keen on visual effects, and these are draining the original meanings of East Asian art including "charm of brush and ink" and "subtle and introspective." The future of the innovation of East Asian art narrative should follow the rule of cultural authenticity as the essence and digital technology as the backing and create an advanced integration framework of the traditional narrative and the modern digital expression and bring both inheritance and innovation into balance. Such a change can not just establish a new direction towards further developments in

East Asian art, but it also can serve as an example how to preserve cultural heritage in the digital world and how to spread it through the Internet and thus ensure the continuity of human civilization in the digital age.

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