The Study on the Aesthetic of Chinese Calligraphy under the Horizon of Information Philosophy †

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Abstract: What is the essence of Chinese Calligraphy beauty? It is the most important and difficult question in the history of Chinese Calligraphy art. The explorations that ancient Chinese artists had made on this question can be classified into three main schools: the first school emphasizes the objective manifestation form, which means that calligraphy beauty is natural and in its form; the second school emphasizes the subjective intention, which means that calligraphy beauty is emotion; the third school emphasizes the combination of subjectivity and objectivity. In my opinion, it is necessary to combine the subjectivity and objectivity when we understand the essence of calligraphy beauty. To understand it, however, we cannot just only depend on Chinese philosophical methodology and traditional western philosophy. But the information philosophy in contemporary China, which is built on the basis of criticizing such traditional dualism, can afford an explicit and systematic explanation to the essence of Chinese Calligraphy, and no matter form, image, meaning and mind can be dialectically unified on the basis of information mediums.

Keywords: information philosophy; calligraphy beauty; form; image; meaning; mind

1. Introduction

What is the essence of Chinese Calligraphy beauty? It is the most important and difficult question in the history of Chinese Calligraphy art. The explorations that ancient Chinese artists had made on this question can be classified into three main schools: objectivism, subjectivism, combination subjectivism and objectivism. In my opinion, it is necessary to combine the subjectivity and objectivity when we want to understand the essence of calligraphy beauty. To understand it, however, we cannot just depend on the ways, like savvy, metaphor and analogy, which are treated as Chinese philosophical methodology. We need to analyze the dialectical unification relationship in mind-form and meaning-image under the system of speculative philosophy, which means we have to use the logical thoughts in western philosophy. It is just that the traditional western philosophy cannot provide a reasonable explanation to the essence of Chinese Calligraphy, due to its dualism worldview of subject-object separation. Therefore, because of the limitations of Chinese philosophy and traditional western philosophy, I consider that the information philosophy will provide a new horizon of studying calligraphy aesthetics.

2. The Three Main Schools of Calligraphy Beauty Essence

What is the essence of Chinese Calligraphy beauty? It is the most important and difficult question in the history of Chinese Calligraphy art. From the point of historical materialism, ancient Chinese artists had made on this question can be classified into three main schools: objectivism, subjectivism, combination subjectivism and objectivism.

2.1. Calligraphy Beauty Is Objective

2.2.1. Natural Calligraphy Beauty

Calligraphy beauty is natural, which is the mainstream point in the ancient calligraphy aesthetics. Cai Yong puts forward that "calligraphy originates in nature, so after the nature appears, then yin&yang arises, and then form & tendency comes into being in order". His idea shows the philosophical foundation of calligraphy beauty, which means calligraphy beauty is natural. And this idea derives from the Book of Changes which suggests cognitive approach that people get the images by watching nature. Essentially, the above-mentioned nature refers specifically to life and production practice, because social life is source of Chinese characters.

2.2.2. Formal Calligraphy Beauty

First of all, the ancient calligraphy theory of calligraphy image description is the theoretical basis of the formal calligraphy beauty, such as Cai Yong's image description and Ou Yangxun's "*Thirty-six Laws*". Secondly, Kang Youwei's calligraphy form theory initially establishes the modern form aesthetics. In his book "Extension of Double Pedals for the Boat of Art (Guang Yi Zhou Shuang Ji)", from the Chinese and Western text comparison perspective, he suggests that the calligraphy beauty is in its form: "Chinese characters focus on the form. Foreign characters focus on sound. Chinese use words through the eyes, foreigners use the ears." [1] Again, Wang Guowei continues the "form theory". He puts forward that all the beauty is the beauty of form in one of his papers, named *Classical and Elegant Beauty in the Aesthetic Position*. He suggests calligraphy beauty is based on the beauty of Chinese characters, which is the second form beauty. Here, it is not to argue the rationality of his second form of aesthetics, but his theory has becomes an important view of formal beauty. Finally, in the modern calligraphy period, from the perspective of modern calligraphy art, calligraphy form beauty becomes a trend—calligraphy is the art of formal beauty, it should be emphasized that calligraphy aesthetics should focus on the beauty of calligraphy form.

2.2. Calligraphy Beauty Is Subjective

Calligraphy beauty is to convey the performance of human emotions, which is the mainstream of classical calligraphy interpretation. This is related to the essence of Chinese culture that "Chinese culture is essentially a subjective culture". In essence, this is consistent with the traditional aesthetics of Mao poetry. Specifically, the following two views are typical subjective theories. Sun Guoting suggests that emotion occurs and is expressed in *fine art of Chinese calligraphy (Shu Pu)*. Similarly Su Shi says the calligraphy writing unconsciously is better. Marx puts forward the essence of beauty is that people measure objects within the inherent scale. From this point of view, subjectivism of calligraphy beauty reflects that ancient calligraphy theorists stress the human subjectivity. So through projecting this manifestation of human subjectivity on the calligraphy, Calligraphy theorists established new aesthetic appreciation standards, which is the calligraphy is just like the person who write it.

2.3. Calligraphy Beauty Is the Combination Subjectivism and Objectivism

Liu Xizai proposes calligraphy imagery theory, which is that the meaning is innate and the basis of calligraphy, while image is postnatal and the application of calligraphy. What is the meaning and image? Wang Bi considers that if we get the meaning, we can cast off the image. Also Zhuang Zi deems "we can get the meaning and forget the text. Combining two theories, we can understand that the core viewpoint of classical calligraphy aesthetics is about Dao, meaning, text and image" [2]. In the domain of calligraphy, the imagery is aesthetic process combining the presentation and artistic state. Hence calligraphy imagery is the combination of presentation and abstraction. That is to say, calligraphy imagery builds on presentation but transcends presentation.

3. The Cognitive Barrier of the Essence of Classical Calligraphy Aesthetics

Hegel considers that essence is multi-level and multi-faceted, and people may have a glimpse on the different essence of things with different methods and perspectives; with the deepening of people's understanding, the essence of things will be multi-dimensional and multi-directional presented. Therefore, the essence of calligraphy beautify will also be multi-dimensional and multi-directional shown. However, classical calligraphy aesthetics and the cognition of classical calligraphy beauty are mostly scattered and fragmented.

First, both objectivism of calligraphy beauty and the subjectivism of calligraphy beauty are separated. If we emphasis too much on that calligraphy beauty is objective and calligraphy is from life, we will easily to ignore significance of human subjectivity and inspiration.

Second, over-emphasis on the subjectivism is easy to confuse the calligraphy text and calligraphic imagery. Also over-emphasis on the subjectivism is easy to abandon the objective rules and standard of calligraphy, such as the problems of Song dynasty calligraphy.

Third, calligraphy imagery combining subjectivism and objectivism tends to separate meaning from image and value meaning over image. Because the image is the foundation of acquiring meaning, image begins to be the methods to present Tao of Saint. However, the Tao of calligraphy is different from Tao of Saint. Therefore, we must break through this level limitation, and establish a modern new calligraphy imagery theory.

In my opinion, it is necessary to combine the subjectivity and objectivity when we want to understand the essence of calligraphy beauty. To understand it, however, we cannot just depend on the ways, like "savvy, metaphor and analogy" [3], which are treated as Chinese philosophical methodology. The above cognition is ideological root-case of The Cognitive Barrier of the Essence of Classical Calligraphy aesthetics. So we need to analyze the dialectical unification relationship in mind-form and meaning-image under the system of speculative philosophy, which means we have to use the logical thoughts in western philosophy. It is just that the traditional western philosophy cannot provide a reasonable explanation to the essence of Chinese Calligraphy, due to its dualism worldview of subject-object separation. But the information philosophy in contemporary China, which is built on the basis of criticizing such traditional dualism, can afford an explicit and systematic explanation to the essence of Chinese Calligraphy, and no matter form, image, meaning and mind can be dialectically unified on the basis of information mediums.

4. The Creative Transformation of Calligraphy Aesthetics

What do "meaning" and "image" of calligraphy mean? Information philosophy considers that "meaning" is the content and "image" is the carrier; that is to say, "meaning" is information and "image" is form, such as different growth rings of a tree stand for "image" and the content of it present "meaning" which is the tree's experiences on seasonal changes. Similarly, we can understand different "meanings" from diverse calligraphy compositions which are the "images". For instance, we can get two different emotions which is free and rigorous separately from Huai Su and Yan Zhenqing's compositions.

In my opinion, "images" are the different chirographies. Prof. Zhong Mingshan considers the calligraphy imagery is combination of presentation and abstraction, that is to say, "image" is information of concepts and imagery. What is information of concepts and imagery? "In the course of thinking, if we use the various manifestations of the sensibility of memory in the representation to create a new image, then we call this thinking process imaginal thinking process, and call the new creative image information of concepts and imagery" [4]. Specifically, the five calligraphy chirographies are different information of concepts and imagery, and the "meanings" of them are different. For example, regular script stands for elegant and majestic style; the running script and cursive script present free and relaxed.

In conclusion, image of calligraphy is carrier of meaning of calligraphy and contains the information from meaning of calligraphy. Under view of the Information Philosophy, the image of calligraphy is the second nature of information, and the meaning of information is the third nature information. Further, the image and meaning of calligraphy is not only appreciators' content, but

also the way of approaching to the composer. In my viewpoint, the form, image, meaning and mind of calligraphy have constituted different level of calligraphy aesthetic process, and also corresponded to the different levels of information. Therefore, I consider that the information philosophy will create and provide a new horizon of studying calligraphy aesthetics.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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